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*Ernest Fairfield, or,  
Two terms at St. Andrews*

Arthur Noel Malan







**ERNEST FAIRFIELD.**









“ . . . and then, staring at the old man from head to foot, he said : ‘Hullo !  
do you live in that house ?’ ”

*Frontispiece.*

See page 18.

# ERNEST FAIRFIELD

OR

Two Terms at St. Andrew's

BY THE

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To  
EAGLE HOUSE BOYS,  
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE,  
THIS STORY IS DEDICATED  
BY  
THE AUTHOR

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*FLOREAT ÆTERNUM STANS AQUILINA DOMUS*



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# ERNEST FAIRFIELD

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## CHAPTER I.

### SIN VINCENT.

As the train speeds on its journey from London to Exeter, midway between Yeovil and Axminster it passes through the Blackmoor Vale district, a part of England dear to the memory of many a foxhunter, and famous in its records of the chase. And often perhaps on a summer afternoon, when the sun seems to focus all its heat upon some melting passenger in a first-class carriage, that passenger at this point of the journey, weary of his *Times* and *Punch*, may look out of the carriage window towards the south. His eye will rest upon a purple pine-clad hill sleeping in the soft airy distance. And then, if his languid energies are equal to the exertion, perhaps he will ask of some fellow-passenger, 'What's that hill?'

It is Lewesdon Hill, the highest eminence in Dorset-

shire, fairer far than its more rugged sister Pilsden, which lies further away to the west. It forms a landmark for vessels sailing up and down Channel ; it has been celebrated in verse by the poet Crowe, and beyond this I know not that it has much pretension to fame. But as the fondest memories of the principal characters in this story circle around that hill, it may well claim a passing notice.

The view from the summit of Lewesdon Hill is at all times full of striking beauty. In every direction there lies outspread a panoramic expanse of undulating hills and vales richly wooded, corn-land where Ceres might find luxuriant delight, meadow-land where cattle can grow sleek, and sheep find abundant pasture. There are towns and villages and scattered homesteads, either clearly seen or suggested by the vaporous veil that crowns some hill intercepting them from sight, or by blue smoke rising above the trees. Beautiful at all times are those wooded regions, whether in the brilliant green of spring, or the full foliage of summer, or the golden glories of autumn, or the bleak desolation of winter. But most beautiful of all in the full blaze of a cloudless summer day, when beneath heaven's blue dome the landscape is palpitating in a hazy mirage ; when every outline is softened by the amethystine radiance of the atmosphere, and Nature reposes in silent submission to the lord of light. Then on the top of Lewesdon Hill the supremacy of summer heat is not felt ; for the south wind wafts

thither its refreshing breeze, laden with gracious vigour from the broad blue sea. Yonder lies Bridport, famed far and wide for its fishing-nets; there is Eype Church high on the hill, and Charmouth, and Lyme Regis behind the headland; Pilsden and Lambert's Castle stand up like giant fortresses guarding the pleasant Vale of Marshwood; Blackdown points towards the blue Devonian hills; Greenham and Wayford and Drimpton lead the eye on to the village of Broadwindsor, with its noble church and Elizabethan vicarage, among the trees. And so on, round the great circle bounded by dim blue hills of faintest cobweb tint in the far, far horizon, where a streak of silver marks the other Channel with the Steep and Flat Holms; Glastonbury Tor, Alfred's Tower; Wadden Hill, Beaminster, Stoke Abbas, Melplash, Egerdon Hill, and Admiral Hardy's monument crowning the heights above Weymouth. Such are some of the many features of interest that meet the eye.

In a certain hamlet, hidden behind one of those wooded hills, and known as Beechenhurst, stands an old hostelry—the Red Lion. Its whitewashed walls and oak-grained windows, and gaily-painted sign-board representing a blood-red monarch of the forest rampant, are intended to attract the passing villager with the prospect of rest and refreshment; and on a certain hot afternoon towards the end of August there was one old man, at any rate, who yielded to these

allurements. He sat on a rude bench by the door, with crossed hands resting on a stout hazel stick. A mug of home-brewed ale stood on the rustic table before him, from which he took an occasional draught. His face wore an expression of resignation, and seemed furrowed with lines of care; and at intervals he took out a red handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his eyes after the manner of old men of the poorer class. I never heard his surname: he was called John, or 'Old John,' or more commonly 'Old What's o'Clock,' in allusion to one of his principal duties; for he filled the important office of sexton, and was responsible for the behaviour of the church clock. The wording of his commission, duly drawn up and signed by the vicar and churchwardens of Beechenhurst more than twenty years ago, demanded that he should 'wind, regulate, clean, and repair the church clock, and be answerable for its keeping correct time.' These requirements might seem formidable to other parish officers in a similar position, but they caused little or no anxiety to old John, for he had a natural gift for mechanical work, and earned many an honest shilling by cleaning and repairing the 'grandfather's clocks' in the village.

For several years this venerable old gaffer had been general servant to Colonel Fairfield, a retired Indian officer, who lived at Combe Grange. In that capacity his duties were varied; he looked after the garden, pumped water, cleaned boots and knives, and made

himself smart of an evening to wait at dinner. The household consisted of Colonel and Mrs. Fairfield and their son Ernest, when home for the holidays; while the domestic staff included the cook, housemaid, old John, and a boy to look after the horse and carriage. But a few months ago Colonel Fairfield had died, and the establishment was broken up. The servants were discharged, the furniture sold, and a notice-board was erected by the front gate announcing that this desirable residence and grounds of four acres were for sale.

‘Old What’s o’Clock’ was left in solitary charge of the Grange, and having plenty of time at his disposal, he often made a pilgrimage up the hill to the village. The neighbours generally were disposed to look kindly upon him, and pitied his loneliness, and the good-natured old women would sometimes ask him into their cottages to take a dish of tea. On such occasions they often tried to draw from him information about the break-up at the Grange, over which a certain veil of mystery hung. But old John did not give them much encouragement, being very reserved and reluctant to say anything on that subject. Therefore the gossips had to content themselves with interchanging their own opinions, and it was generally supposed that the Colonel had been carried off by some sudden seizure, though what had become of his lady and the young gentleman nobody knew at all. ‘Old What’s o’Clock’s’ common remark was, ‘Ah, it was a sad, sad business! Poor dear master! and he

such a promising young gentleman. Enough to break his mother's heart, sure enough!' And when they pressed him to tell them more, he would shake his head and say: 'No, no! Giddy words can't cure aching hearts—gossip never mended mischief.' And so it came to pass, in consequence of his persistent refusal to talk upon the subject, that some of the neighbours would darkly hint that old John knew more than he cared to say—that 'twould have been a bad thing for him if there had been a crowner's inquest; leastways, the old chap had been half-crazy since the Colonel's death. And so in some directions the cold shoulder was turned towards him. Old John did not trouble himself much about what they thought or said: he went his way, they might go theirs; he didn't want to meddle with their affairs—they might let his alone. And so, as often as not, he would stroll up to the Red Lion when he knew the men had not yet left work, and have his pint of ale in peace, as he had done upon this August afternoon.

Having finished his humble refreshment, the sexton set out on his homeward way. He hobbled slowly down the village street, and soon after passing the last of the whitewashed cottages he turned into a lane on the left. It was such a lane as one meets with only in the counties of Dorset, Devon, and Somerset—a deep cutting with hedges straggling in wild luxuriance up banks at least eighteen feet high. Foxgloves, honeysuckles, brambles, and hazels mingled with tall grasses

and ferns in the wildest profusion to form a tangled undergrowth of shaded green ; while ash-trees rose above with their graceful branches and fairy feathery foliage. It was such a lane as an artist loves to study, though he despairs of imitating with colour and brush the inimitable trceries of Nature's handiwork. The cool shade of this lane was comforting to the soul of old John after the heat of the upward journey ; and he heaved a sigh of relief as he picked his way down the steep stony path to the point where it joined the high-road. There, on the right side, standing back from the road about eighty yards, was the old house known as Combe Grange.

It was a long, low, old-fashioned country-house, built of Ham Hill stone, fretted all over with lichens, green, yellow, purple, and gray, which dressed the walls in harmonious tints of softest colouring. The front-door was in the middle, and on each side were three windows, narrow for their height. Above these were seven windows like them in every respect, and as many dormer windows in the roof. Behind all these twenty windows the white blinds were drawn down ; no smoke issued from any chimney ; the broad, straight carriage-drive was overgrown with weeds ; the turf on either side resembled rank mowing-grass ; the flower-beds were lost in a wilderness of rank desolation, a few of the more hardy annuals spreading their untutored growth among usurping weeds.

Deep lay the shadows on the old Grange, for the



sun had sunk behind the hills. The woods that rose behind the house were still flushed with a rosy glow ; the western sky was resplendent with the glory of sunset crimson and gold ; but the old house lay wrapped in shade, the white window-blinds lending to it a ghastly death-like aspect, while sheeted wreaths of mist rose silently from the wooded hollows, putting forth spectral arms, oh, so slowly ! weird phantoms of night creeping in the gloom, and gathering the shroud around their shivering forms. Combe Grange is a lovely spot in the broad sunshine of summer noon, but it is a ghostly spot after sunset at all times.

The sexton approached the rusty iron gates, and taking a key from his pocket, he stood fumbling at the padlock longer than was absolutely necessary, for his attention was attracted by a boy running along the road towards him. He looked about fifteen years of age, and as he came up panting he stopped opposite the gate and had a fit of coughing ; and then, staring at the old man from head to foot, he said :

‘Hullo, do you live in that house ?’

‘I do, sir.’

‘Well, I say, it’s a queer-looking place ! They don’t spend much time weeding the walks ; and all the blinds down. What a ghostly-looking hole ! I shouldn’t think anyone would like to live there.’

‘Maybe not, and maybe some would like to be living there now as lived there before. Be you a-stop-

ping with Mr. St. Vincent, the gent as has taken Bracken Dene for the summer? I see you with him at church last Sunday.'

'Yes; my name's Sin Vincent. They spell it "Saint," and they call it "Sin." I suppose they don't think there's much difference between a saint and a sinner. "Vincent" means "conquering," and "Sin Conquering" is a queer name for a chap to inherit from his ancestors. He's my uncle. I'm spending the holidays with him. It's awfully slow; the old buffer is as surly as a bear with a sore head, and there's not a soul to talk to. It's enough to give one the blues.'

The sexton had unlocked the gate and opened it, and was inside. His new acquaintance, glad to get the chance of talking to anyone, asked if he might come in and just take a look round.

'Aye, if you please, sir. It's a bit untidy-like; nothing's been done to it since the board was put up after the auction.'

Passing up the drive, and round to the back of the house, as the front-door was locked and bolted, they came into a small paved yard, surrounded by dilapidated out-buildings; and old John, taking out another key, unlocked the back-door.

The boy could not repress a shudder as he entered the house. It felt so chill and dreary. The sexton took him into some of the deserted rooms. 'That's the kitchen, where I sleep; that's the study; that's

the dining-room ; that's the billiard-room.' Then they went upstairs and looked at some of the bedrooms. A damp and deadly atmosphere seemed to brood over the vacant chambers.

'I say, I wonder you aren't in a funk living in this horrible old place all alone. Isn't it haunted ?'

'Aye, maybe; but there isn't nothing about the place that I need be afeared of; none that ever lived here would wish to harm me.'

They had come downstairs again, and the old man opened the door of a room which he seemed purposely to have left to the last. It was on the right of the entrance-hall. His companion looked in. The room differed in one respect from all the others, in that it was not entirely destitute of furniture. There stood in the middle of that room a violoncello-case of antiquated construction. It was studded with iron nails, and fitted with iron handles and clasps. What a strange occupant for a desolate house ! Grim, weird, silent—its sphinx-like, orbless head thrown back, gazing blindly upon nothing ! Like the statue of Memnon at Thebes, it seemed a dumb witness of the past.

The boy stood staring with a sort of creepy horror upon the ugly thing. Old John laid one hand upon his arm, and with the other pointed to the violoncello-case, and in low, measured tones he said :

'That's the haunted room. That's the very spot where my dear master used to sit of an evening and

play his fiddlingchello. He loved his music, that he did; but it was sold with the rest of the furniture, and the gentleman what bought it wouldn't have the case. He said it was too ugly, and he had another made. So there it has stood ever since. But if ever wood had life in it, it's that old case. . . . Afraid? No, I bain't afraid. I come here of an evening when the sun gets low, and the light falls on it, or may be when it's night and the moon shines in. I bring in my chair and sit and listen; and then the soft, sad music floats round the room, just as it used to, and it makes my flesh creep; but still I like to hear it, so low, and solemn, and awful. Oh, my poor dear master!

The old man was quite overcome. He leant against the wall and covered his face with his hands, and rocked himself to and fro, and sobbed and moaned in a piteous manner. Then, suddenly pausing, he raised his wizen right hand with uplifted finger, and listened with a far-away look in his tearful eyes. His ragged hair hung loose over his neck, and he seemed to hear the soft *Æolian* melancholy music.

'Hush! don't you hear it?' he said.

The boy was spell-bound with terrible fascination.

'No, I don't hear anything. Let me go. I can't stand this; it's too awful.'

And he took hold of the sexton's coat and pulled him away.

'There's no cause to be afeared, young gentleman.

You'll soon get over it. I'll walk back with you to Bracken Dene, if you like.'

'Thank you. Come along, then.'

They walked most of the way in silence; but when the boy had partly recovered from his fright, he asked what had happened in the deserted house. Old John was rather more communicative to him than he was to the village gossips.

As they walked up the drive at Bracken Dene, 'Sin Vincent' asked the name of the gentleman who had died.

'His name was Colonel Fairfield, and his son Master Ernest——'

'WHAT?'

## CHAPTER II.

### MAURICE AT COMBE GRANGE.

JUST one year before the date of the preceding chapter—the same month, August, possibly the same day—‘Old What’s o’Clock’ was busy tidying up the drive, trimming the roses, and pulling up occasional weeds from the radiant flower-beds. Ernest Fairfield, in flannel trousers and shirt, was vigorously driving the mowing-machine, over the pulling of which the red-faced boy, Tom, puffed and blew like an apoplectic seal.

‘Go it, Tom! it will take down some of your fat. We must get it all done in an hour, and you must have the carriage ready by half-past one sharp.

They went at it with a will, and as each fresh line was mown, Ernest turned to look with satisfaction at the result. He was a boy of striking appearance, sixteen years old, with curly brown hair and clear olive complexion that spoke of robust health. His sun-burnt arms showed that the shirt-sleeves were often turned up, and his broad shoulders and deep chest gave promise of his becoming a strong man. They laboured steadily, and in less than an hour the work was accomplished.

‘I say, John, it does look jolly! There’s nothing to beat good turf just mown; how stunning the shadows look upon it!’

‘Aye, sir, there’s not such lawns at any of the houses about; it’s a pleasure to make them look their best.’

‘Right you are, John; and mind you have the tennis-ground marked out before we return.’

Ernest took up his coat and ran, with a hop, skip, and a jump, into the house. A tremendous splashing of water was soon heard in his room, and a few minutes afterwards he reappeared dressed in less fantastic apparel, and bounding down the staircase three steps at a time, with the agility of an athlete, he was in the dining-room before the gong had finished its reverberations. Mrs. Fairfield and the Colonel were already seated at the table. The former was a lady of most gracious manners and beautiful face; the latter was a noble old veteran of martial aspect, with white hair close-cropped, and a white moustache, seventy-five years of age, tall and upright still, and he greeted Ernest with a proud and kindly welcome.

‘Well, my dear boy, you’ve done a good morning’s work. Want your comrade to see the place at its best, eh? That’s right, always plenty of pipe-clay before inspection.’

The smile on Mrs. Fairfield’s face beamed with its brightest light as her eyes rested on the happy countenance of her son. Ernest was in high spirits at the prospect of welcoming a friend of his early school-days

on a visit to Combe Grange. It was Maurice Elton, an orphan, who generally spent his holidays with an uncle and aunt in Hampshire. He and Ernest had been three years together at Highfield House. Maurice had left that school two years ago, and was now at St. Andrew's College, Washborough. Ernest had left Highfield House a term later, and had since been at home, reading two hours a day with the curate, and being supposed to work three hours more by himself. His progress in work had not been satisfactory, since he had no natural taste for the classics, nor yet did Euclid and the kindred subjects find better favour in his eyes. Ernest heartily disliked lessons of all sorts, and though anxious to please his parents, he failed to throw his heart into his work, and so he found the road to learning a rough and weary path. His reports from Dr. Porchester were always excellent in every respect, with the one important exception that he could not be brought to throw energy into the work. Colonel Fairfield did his utmost to impress upon his son the necessity of more serious application. Ernest thoroughly believed in his own heart that he was doing his best, and he was just one among the unnumbered examples of boys of whom it is hard to say whether they fail through their infirmity or their fault. But certain it was that Ernest did fail, and this was a constant source of sorrow and disappointment to his parents.

It was Mrs. Fairfield who proposed to ask Maurice



Elton to spend the last fortnight of the holidays at Combe Grange. She was anxious to interest him afresh in her boy's welfare. Ernest had often spoken with affection and admiration of Maurice. There never was such a hard-working, conscientious, straightforward fellow in the world. Maurice was the chap to get on; he just did stick to his work. But then, to be sure, he liked it, and that made all the difference. Such remarks made Mrs. Fairfield feel sure that Maurice's influence might be of the highest value to Ernest on his introduction to the new school. And when she proposed that Maurice should be asked to Combe Grange, Ernest was delighted, and so he was to drive over to Bridport that afternoon to meet his friend.

The carriage rattled round from the yard punctual to the minute, and was soon bowling along the Bridport road. It took about an hour to drive to the station, and the train was due five minutes after Ernest's arrival. So there was not long to wait, and Ernest got a boy to hold the horse while he went upon the platform to welcome his friend.

The meeting was hilarious. Maurice jumped out of the carriage, and the hand-shaking expressed the warmest pleasure on both sides.

'I'm awfully glad to see you, Ernest. It was good of you to ask me down. I've got a hat-box and rug; mind the fiddle! Thanks, don't bother. There's a portmanteau in the van. Oh, they've bundled it out! Well, how are you?'

‘Oh, I’m all right, old chap, and I *am* glad you’ve come! It will be jolly. I hope we shall be able to amuse you, but I’m afraid you will find it slow. Never mind, you’ve got the old fiddle, I’m glad to see; and there’s a billiard-table for wet days. The governor will be pleased to see the fiddle.’

They talked on as boys do, and shipped the luggage on board the carriage, and then the horse put on his best homeward pace, and so they went on their way rejoicing. Down the steep Fore Street of Bridport, through the outskirts of the town, out upon the wide white road with its ups and downs, mile after mile, joking and laughing and talking over old times, the two friends enjoyed the drive. Maurice had never been in that part of the world before, and Ernest kept him alive to admire the varying outline of hills on the left, with the purple height of Lewesdon, and said he was sure there was nothing to equal it in Hampshire; and so on, until they had nearly accomplished the journey.

‘There’s the house, Maurice; you can just see the chimneys above the trees.’

‘Oh, how jolly and snug it looks! But I’m getting in a great fright. I’ve never paid a visit in my life, Ernest. I don’t know in the least how to behave.’

‘Fright, my dear fellow? If you don’t feel at home after the first five minutes, you may go off again without bothering to unpack your traps.’

‘Oh, but your father, the Colonel! How shall I

ever be able to talk to such a venerable scion of Mars, who has served his country for fifty years ?

‘Bosh, my boy ! He’s the jolliest old gentleman in the British Isles. Just get him on the subject of fiddles, and he’ll love you as his own son.’

The gates of the Grange were open, and the horse went up the drive as if he longed for the consolations of hay and straw in his comfortable stall. But Maurice had time to admire the beautiful lawns on either side, and Ernest was pleased to see the bright white lines of the tennis-court newly-marked, inviting them to play.

‘Oh, won’t we have lots of tennis—rather !’

The Colonel had not returned from his walk, but Mrs. Fairfield was at the door, ready to welcome her visitor. Her eyes always seemed to melt with kindness, and her voice sounded like sweetly-running waters, and her smile gladdened every face on which it beamed. Ernest’s words were more than verified ; it was not a matter of five minutes ; the first words of Mrs. Fairfield’s greeting were enough to make Maurice feel at home.

‘How do you do, Maurice ?’ she said. ‘I am glad to make your acquaintance at last. Ernest has talked so often about you, that you are already a familiar friend to us and no stranger.’

A smile of true sympathy from a lady is generally enough to win a boy’s confidence ; and as Maurice took Mrs. Fairfield’s hand, he felt sure that everything must be delightful in a house with such a lady for its mistress.

Mrs. Fairfield led the way into the drawing-room, where tea was invitingly laid out. It was a pretty room, with three tall windows opening upon the lawn. Jessamine, Banksia roses, honeysuckle, and clematis clambered in graceful festoons over wooden trellis-work between the windows, and mingled their varied scents with the fragrance of roses arranged in bouquets about the room. The soft west wind wandered in, and whispered of cool, refreshing shades in tangled bower and brake, where it loves to hide on hot afternoons.

As I sit writing here in the region of Bagshot Sands, with their resinous, honeyed wildernesses of pine and heather, and scarcity of true English turf, my soul sighs at times for the green meadows of Dorset, Devon, and Somerset, where truly Nature revels in turf—rich, sound, green turf, on which a cricket-ball bowled swiftly does not kick up a small sod, removing the grass, roots and all. But then the muddy roads in those loamy districts—ah! the sand has its advantages, after all!

Mrs. Fairfield watched the two boys as they drank their tea and munched their muffins and talked their happy talk. The contrast between them was striking, both in character and appearance. Ernest, always basking in the light of a happy home and the warmth of a mother's love, with never a cloud to darken the sunshine, secure in the prospect of a comfortable inheritance from his father, bright and thoughtless and

easily influenced, regarded life as the foam on the surface of champagne—a dance of myriad sparkles and a draught of intoxicating delight. Maurice, on the other hand, possessed those sterling qualities which in life's race are generally sure to tell. He had not brilliant abilities, but he was gifted with dogged perseverance. He had been early left an orphan, with no brother or sister, and his enforced isolation had engendered in him a sense of self-reliance, and an absorbing ambition to make his way in the world by dint of energy and industry. Warren Hastings was his favourite model. In work and play he strove to throw his soul into everything he did; and, by patiently 'sticking to it,' he managed, without any specially brilliant qualifications, to gain solid proficiency among his companions in a short time. This course, continued during his early school-days, landed him at the top of the tree all round, and won for him general esteem. Ernest was only one among many who entertained strong admiration for the orphan boy. His masters formed high hopes of his future success. Dr. Porchester used to say in his reports: 'Commands the highest respect in work and play; thoroughly in earnest and full of grand promise.' In spite of such brilliant achievements, Maurice was humble-minded and free from any conceit. He used to excuse himself for plodding at his work by acknowledging that he was such a duffer, that unless he did so he should never be free from impositions. Both boys were

warm-hearted and cheerful in disposition, and the contrast in their characters only served to knit them more closely together.

Mrs. Fairfield felt convinced, as she glanced from one to the other while they talked over old Highfield days, that Maurice was just the friend to help Ernest in strengthening those traits of character in which he was naturally weak. Her earnest prayers were that her son might grow up a noble Christian gentleman, and it was a constant source of sorrow to her to feel that with all his good qualities he was still wanting the reality of determination and serious thought.

‘And now, dear,’ said Mrs. Fairfield, when the light refreshment was over, ‘I dare say Maurice would like to see his room.’

‘Oh yes, mother! Come along, old chap; you must unpack your traps.’

Ernest showed the way, and was soon busily engaged in helping Maurice transfer the contents of his port-manteau to the various drawers intended for their reception. During the operation Ernest was horrified at finding certain volumes stowed away among the shirts and socks which did not suit his ideas of the fitness of things.

‘Why, here’s actually a Liddell and Scott, and selections from Homer! You don’t mean to say you travel about with these horrid books, Daddy? I did think you would have left them behind.’

‘Oh, they don’t take up much room; and besides, I

am such a muff at Greek, you know. We are to do Homer next term, and I am trying to make a bit of a start in it. And, really, it's splendid stuff, some of it. Look here, I'm sure you'll like this. He's talking about Achilles and his myrmidons : he compares them to ravenous wolves, etc. I made it out yesterday—just listen.'

Holding the book in his left hand, with a rhetorical flourish of the right, Maurice began to spout in sound-  
ing rhythmic tones : " And they like ravenous wolves—unutterable might around their hearts—which, having mastered a great antlered stag, devour him upon the mountains—their chaps murderous with blood. Now in a pack they go to lap with their tongues black water '"—(" What's that ?" asked Ernest. " Ink ?")—" dark water from a dark-watered fountain, spitting out the murder of blood."

' Oh, sky that bosh ! It's not bad though, when you know the meaning of the words—but the grind of looking them out ! Why can't they let us use cribs ?'

' Well, never mind—they won't, and there's an end of it. But this next piece is really grand, as good as a fairy-tale. Just listen to this description of Scylla : " In the midst of a rock is a shadowy cave, turned towards darkness and Erebus. In it dwells Scylla, shrieking terribly—her voice like that of a new-born puppy"—(" Not very terrible, I should say !")—" but she is an evil monster. Twelve feet she has, all hideous, and six long necks, and on each of them an awful head

—three rows of teeth, numerous and close, full of black death. In the midst of the hollow cave she lurks, and thrusts forth her heads from the dreadful chasm. And then, peering round the rock, she fishes for dolphins and dogs, and any larger monster, ten thousands of which the deep-roaring *Amphitrité* feeds.”’

‘Daddy, I wish you could be my master—I really believe I should get on. You should look out all the words and make out the sense, and drive it into my thick head. But now a truce to all this sky-larking: let’s go and have a game of billiards. Father has come in by this time, and he will play us two: he said he should like to have a game before dinner. I must introduce you to him.’

‘I can’t play, Ernest. I never had a cue in my hand; but I’d like to look on while you play.’

‘Oh, I’m glad there’s something you can’t do. I’m no use at it, but I can just manage to hit the balls. You’ll soon get into the way of it.’

They went downstairs, and the click of the ivory balls sounded in the direction of the billiard-room.

The Colonel was amusing himself with practising canons, and he greeted Maurice warmly.

‘Ah, I’m very glad to see you, Maurice; welcome to Combe Grange. I hear you play the violin—no instrument like it—we must have a trio after dinner.’

Maurice acknowledged the Colonel’s greeting with becoming modesty, and had his first lesson in billiards,



and after dinner Maurice's violin was produced for the Colonel's inspection.

'Ah, a beautiful instrument—genuine Amati back—no doubt of it, a very valuable violin, Maurice. Where did you pick it up?'

'It belonged to my father, sir. I always heard it was a good one, but never knew it was a genuine original.'

'No doubt about the back—not quite sure about the rest. The neck looks rather modern. But I want to hear it speak. Have you learnt long?'

'I began when I was eight, sir, and have had lessons regularly. I am very fond of it, and practise every day.'

'That's the way. We've got lots of music. Mary, love, show Maurice some of our selections—he's sure to find something to suit his fancy.'

Mrs. Fairfield took out the music, and Maurice pounced upon Rode's 'Air with Variations.'

'Oh, if you would kindly play the accompaniment of this, Mrs. Fairfield, I should like to try it.'

The performance was a brilliant success. Maurice played with considerable taste and execution, and brought out a powerful tone. He had gone at his fiddle as he went at everything else, with all his heart; and when the heart is given to that peerless instrument, if there is a spark of true genius to assist it, the result is grand.

The Colonel's enthusiasm knew no bounds. He

could hardly sit still during the performance. His eye kindled, and he waved time with his finger, and as the last note died away he jumped up from his chair and patted Maurice on the back, and seizing his hand, shook it vigorously, and said :

‘God bless you, my boy! Capital! splendid! I haven’t had such a treat for years!’

Mrs. Fairfield said :

‘You really do play beautifully, Maurice.’

And Ernest chimed in :

‘Well done, Daddy, old chap! I knew you’d bring down the house! I couldn’t have done it better myself!’

Then followed a trio, in which Maurice acquitted himself with equal credit, and so his first evening at the Grange closed.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE SEAL OF THE COVENANT.

MAURICE had now been at Combe Grange a week, and found his visit more enjoyable than he had imagined possible. His uncle and aunt in Hampshire were always very kind to him, and he felt much gratitude and affection towards them, but never had he really known what most boys mean by 'home.' Now he was suddenly plunged into the midst of a home in which the spell of mutual affection rendered all things bright and perfect. The Colonel was so genial and cheerful that his presence never shed a breath of chill influence upon the home circle. And Mrs. Fairfield appeared to Maurice the most lovable person he had ever known. Her heart, always abounding in kindness, overflowed with sympathy for the orphan boy. At first she was inclined to treat him with affectionate regard for Ernest's sake, because they were such good friends. But very soon her affection warmed towards him for his own sake. She found him so unselfish, generous, and open-hearted, and he responded so keenly to every overture of kindness. Maurice's soul unfolded in the sunshine of

her smile, and seemed to enjoy a new existence. It was as if a blank space had been suddenly filled in the volume of his life—as though water had been given to one suffering from unappeased thirst. He felt as if he could almost worship the ground on which Mrs. Fairfield trod.

One afternoon, when walking with Ernest over the hills towards the sea, Maurice said:

‘Ernest, you ought to be the happiest fellow in the world.’

‘Well, Maurice, I suppose I am as happy as most chaps; but why do you think so?’

‘I think your mother is the most beautiful and lovable lady on the face of the earth, and it ought to make you the happiest fellow alive to be her son.’

‘Well, Daddy, I believe you’re right about mother, and I love her with all my heart, and it does make me happy. I am so glad you like her.’

‘Like her! that’s not half strong enough, Ernest. I never knew what a mother’s love was, but she is so kind and loving towards me, that my friendship for her would have gladdened the heart of old Lælius. I don’t want to talk shop, but I never understood till now what he says about friendship springing up from mutual feelings of love. I am so thankful I came here, Ernest. I haven’t half done yet. If I had a mother living like yours, it would be the one object of my life to please her, and make her the utmost

possible return for all her goodness. I don't want to preach or set myself up as better than you, or even imply that you don't try to please her; I only just say what I should try and do, and I should hope you are determined to do no less, for I don't suppose there are many fellows in the world who have such a mother. There, that's the longest speech I ever made !

That night Mrs. Fairfield went as usual into Ernest's room after he was in bed, to give him her last blessing, and afterwards she also went to see Maurice. Standing by his bedside, she said :

‘My dear boy, Ernest has told me what you talked about this afternoon. I was so delighted to hear it. You must always look upon me as your mother. I shall always think of you as my son. You must write to me from school whenever you like, and be sure that I shall sympathize in everything you tell me. God bless and keep you, my dear boy.’

‘Oh, Mrs. Fairfield, how can I thank you for all your goodness? I cannot say what I feel, but I shall always love you with all my heart, and you have made me so happy;’ and Maurice took the hand that had been laid upon his head and kissed it reverently, while tears not one nor two dimmed the lustre of the gems that sparkled on its fingers.

The last remaining days passed pleasantly and only too quickly. There were two cricket-matches, *Beechenhurst v. Beaminster*, in which Ernest played a fine innings of fifty-six, while Maurice made twenty-eight, and

dealt havoc among the foe with his slow twisters. In the other match against Bridport, Beechenhurst was hopelessly discomfited by a left-hand bowler, who sent the stumps flying all over the field, and neither Maurice nor Ernest scored one run between them.

Then the Curate came in often, and Patrick O'Grady, the comical, good-humoured little Irish doctor who had settled in the village some years ago, and, being of independent means, found the small practice afforded by the neighbourhood sufficient to keep him employed. And as he liked the country, he cared not to go further with a chance of faring worse. This pair came in often, and made up a capital game of tennis. The Colonel and his wife would sit under the shade of the trees, she with her work, he with the *Times* and a cigar, and it gave them keen pleasure to see how thoroughly the boys enjoyed their exercise.

Then of an evening after dinner they played billiards and played music. All the trios the Colonel could lay hands upon were brought out, until Ernest, who was not very musical in his tastes, declared that he should like to build a funeral pyre with the music on the top of the piano, and offer the 'cello and violin as a burnt sacrifice to the Classic Nine.

Mrs. Fairfield found many an opportunity of talking to Maurice. She discussed with him every subject in which he took interest—his work, his fiddle, his home-life, his friends and his future prospects. But especially on the last afternoon did she confide to him the

charge of Ernest on beginning a new life at school. Ernest was so thoughtless and easily influenced, so unconcerned for the serious reality of life, that Mrs. Fairfield felt much anxiety about the prospect. At Highfield House he had gone through his career in a pleasant and easy manner, never attaining more than average success in anything, and Dr. Porchester admitted that there was a sense of disappointment about him.

‘Oh, Maurice, I do so hope and pray that as he grows older he will acquire more firmness of character, and not always be so like a butterfly. So much depends upon the way he now begins—upon the friends he makes. He has so little steadfastness of purpose; he has a good heart, and is thoroughly affectionate towards his father and myself; and if only he can have strength to avoid the evil and choose the good, I feel sure that he will do well. Of course there are some boys of low principle in every large school; but I hope and believe that the tone of St. Andrew’s is healthy, and that a boy has every chance there of growing up a God-fearing man.’

‘There are several very nice fellows there, Mrs. Fairfield, and there are some very nasty ones; but I suppose it’s the same everywhere. The prefects are very strict in looking after us, and will not allow the rules to be broken; but of course cads will find opportunity to escape them, and Ernest will have to push his way like every other new fellow. You may be sure I

will do my best to put him up to things, but I'm afraid it won't be much. He was awfully popular at Highfield House, and he's sure to be the same at St. Andrew's.'

'Ah, Maurice, you know how earnestly my heart is set upon his doing well. I have possibly not said as much as I ought to him, but I have been fearful of saying too much. I know boys object to what they call "jaw." But I feel so thankful that you are a friend to Ernest, and I confide him to your kind interest, my dear boy.'

Maurice threw all his soul into his answer, that he would do all he could to deserve her confidence.

That afternoon the two boys had one last walk up Lewesdon Hill. Ernest was more thoughtful and less talkative than usual. He walked along with a serious expression, and answered abruptly when Maurice spoke. The latter understood his feelings, and did not press the conversation. It was Ernest who eventually broke the silence.

'I don't know how it is, but somehow I feel rather glum about to-morrow, Daddy. It's horrid having to leave home, and it's always a nuisance beginning again. But I'm awfully glad you're coming.'

'Cheer up, old chap; you'll like it well enough when you have shaken down. Of course you feel down in the mouth at leaving your mother. Who wouldn't? I do, I know—though I never minded leaving anyone before. I shall never cease being thankful that you



asked me down here, Ernest. Your mother's kindness to me will never be forgotten as long as I live.'

'Oh, it isn't altogether that—but I have a sort of nasty feeling about it all. I know I'm a flighty harum-scarum weather-cock sort of chap—mother always says so—and if I get into scrapes it will be so horrid for her. I do hope I shall go on all right. You know the dodge, Daddy ; I wish you would tell me.'

'Well, I'll tell you what a parson said who came to preach to us one Sunday last term. He just could preach. He said, "Boys, if you want to keep straight, fear God, say your prayers, and think of your mothers ; a threefold cord is not quickly broken." I could not exactly follow the last part at the time, but I can now. I cannot remember my own mother, but henceforth yours shall take her place, and I shall try and think of her always.'

'So will I, Daddy, and I shall think of you when you're not by. How much longer are you going to be at St. Andrew's ?'

'About two years, I believe. It's a long time, and then I hope to go to Oxford. Armstrong is going there in a year, and one or two others. He's the senior prefect. Everyone expects he'll get a scholarship. I hope you'll like him, Ernest. Of course, being a new fellow, you will not have much to do with him at first. But I shall get him to take an interest in you. And he's such a splendid man, such grand shoulders, and as brave as a lion. Some fellows say he has an awful

temper, but he never gets excited unless there's a cause; and then woe betide the fellow that excites him. Old Twopenny—he's the second master—said that Armstrong would do for a model of Apollo. You should just see him hit at cricket!

The boys had now reached the top of Lewesdon Hill. Pilsden loomed to the right, under a frowning canopy of cloud, through which the slanting rays of a stormy sunset burst with broad shafts of yellow light. Ernest said, 'We often get these jolly wild sunsets. I know the look of old Pilsden by heart, with his black face frowning under the purple clouds, and the western line of pale blue hills lying somewhere down by Devon and Porlock, and those lovely heathery combs. It makes me feel quite poetical! I always used to think of this view at Highfield House.'

They walked under the pines, and Ernest stopped by a certain tree.

'I once had an elder brother Frank, and we often walked up here, and one day when I was a very small chap I asked him to climb up this tree and see if there was anything in a nest at the top. I had seen a squirrel humbugging about up there. Well, he climbed up, and I was in an awful funk that he would fall, and while he was up the tree I cut the letters F. F. in the bark. I have often trimmed them and deepened them since—there they are. Then the day before Frank sailed for the Cape, we made a covenant under this tree that we would always be loyal to each other, and

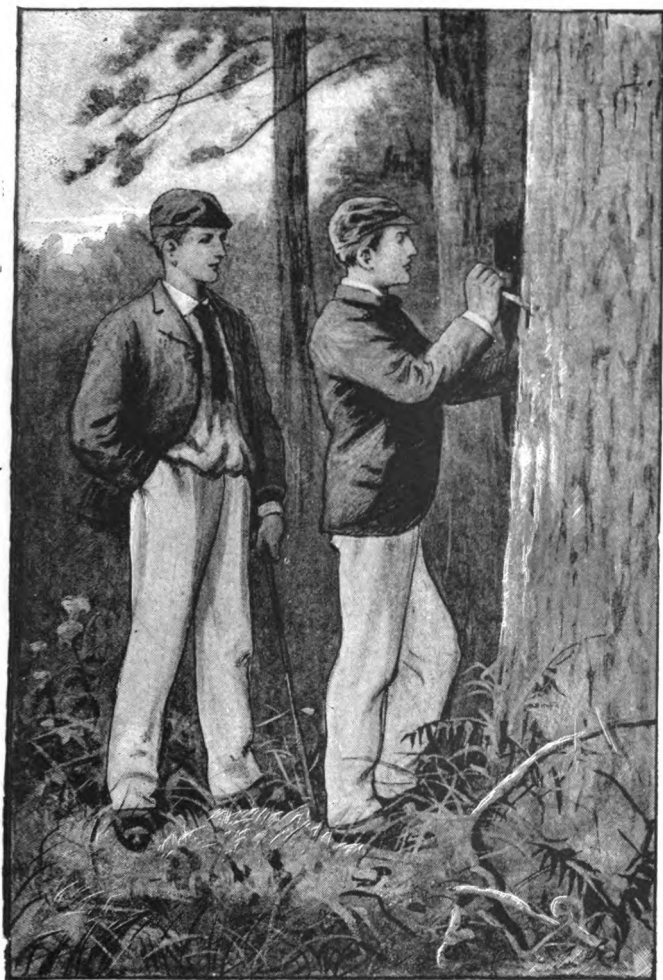
if ever one was in trouble the other should do his best to back him up and get him out of the mess. Frank died of fever before he had been out there a year; and I want you to take his place, Maurice. Will you promise always to stick to me? I feel so strong when you are by. Shall we promise always to be the best friends?

‘Yes, Ernest, we will. Your mother has promised to be a mother to me, and so we are brothers. Here under this sacred tree we shake hands and vow eternal friendship!’

Then, as they stood there, Maurice took out his knife and hacked off a small block of the solid bark, and as they walked back he fashioned it into an oval, and smoothed one side, and carved upon it with the points of his knife a pine and hill.

‘There, Ernest, that’s the seal of our covenant!’

‘I will always keep it, Maurice.’



“‘There, Ernest, that's the seal of our covenant!’”

See page 44.



## CHAPTER IV.

### ST. ANDREW'S.

ST. ANDREW'S COLLEGE, Washborough, was described in the county papers as a school for the sons of gentlemen, wherein a liberal education was offered to boys preparing for the Universities, Civil Service, naval, military, and mercantile professions. Though professing to include within its educational embrace the sons of gentlemen only, at the time of which I write its condition was not so exuberantly prosperous as to allow of very delicate discrimination; and upon its roll were certainly numbered some boys whose mother-tongue savoured of a dialect not usually adopted by the refined orders of society—boys whose parents described St. Andrew's to their friends as 'a 'andsome 'ouse, thorough genteel-like, you know.'

But in two respects the college flattered itself upon occupying a level considerably above similar establishments in the neighbourhood. It would have nothing to do with day-boys, and it possessed a head-master renowned for sound learning and able administration. Those competent to form a just estimation of Dr. Saunderson said that he was too good for the place, that he ought to be at one of the public schools, where

his light would shine under more favourable circumstances. But whether from necessity or preference, he remained where he was until age compelled him to retire from scholastic labours; and though his talents may have been buried in uncongenial soil, yet he did a great work in a firm, quiet, and unobtrusive way.

Ernest's first impressions of the town of Washborough were formed upon the top of an omnibus as he and Maurice drove up from the station. It was a hot afternoon in September, and the sleepy old town lay sweltering in the blaze of unclouded sunshine. The people in the streets walked slowly, and kept to the shady sides. The horses seemed to feel unusual distress as they toiled up the long hill upon which the town is built. The bells of the Minster Church were chiming for the afternoon service, and a few old ladies dressed in black were wending their way to seek refreshing comfort for body and soul within the holy precincts of its dim religious walls.

In due time the boys were set down at the college gates, and Maurice, having introduced Ernest at headquarters, took him all over the place. Ernest was struck by the size of the buildings, the principal façade being of imposing proportions, with a noble central tower and massive square towers flanking the long line of building on either side. There was a broad gravel playground in front of the college, then terraces and steps leading down to the cricket-field, which commanded a magnificent view of the town and valley and hills beyond.

The first weeks of term may be passed over, during which time Ernest was settling down into his place. He had been put in the 'Shell,' that general receptacle for average boys of the average age. There were three forms below it—Upper and Lower Fourth and Third. There were nineteen boys in the Shell; twenty-five in the Fourths, and seven in the Third. In the Lower Fifth were fifteen boys; in the Middle and Upper Fifth sixteen and seventeen respectively; above which were the Lower and Upper Sixth, making up a roll of 125 boys. Maurice had found himself promoted, and was now a prefect.

So far things had gone smoothly with Ernest. He had been put thoroughly in the way of all school traditions and requirements by Maurice, who was conscientiously fulfilling his promises to Mrs. Fairfield. With the masters Ernest was not in very high favour. They found his work generally deficient in energetic endeavour. They all thought he showed ability, but want of application, and his place in class was usually as low as it could be. There was likewise a laxity observable in his conduct, a thoughtless, easy-going, frivolous way of doing things, which was not commendable in a new boy. He had been more than once in a scrape which barely escaped the prefectorial censure. He had been late for roll on half-holidays. He had been caught smoking with another boy by one of the masters, who reported him to Dr. Saunderson, and he had been severely reprimanded, and only



escaped public punishment as being a new boy. The doctor had spoken to Maurice, knowing that he took an interest in Ernest.

‘Elton, I don’t at all like the way Fairfield has begun. I wish you would give him a strong hint to be more careful in his conduct. He will get into serious trouble if he does not mind.’

The fact was that the riff-raff sediment of idlers and loafers were not slow to see what sort of a fellow Ernest was. His handsome face and manly presence lent an air of respectability to their company. They flattered his vanity, and easily got him to cast in his lot with them.

There was one boy in particular among the less reputable members of the college who spread his nets in Ernest’s sight, nor found it in vain. His name was Edgar Johnson. He had been in the Shell two terms already, and seemed likely to spend the remainder of his time there, since he was dull of intellect as well as incorrigibly idle. He was a boy of unpleasant countenance, with pale complexion, straight black hair, large black staring eyes of wild and vacant expression, narrow stooping shoulders and awkward shuffling walk. By all who could lick him the sobriquet ‘Cad’ was generally prefixed to his name. Ernest being habitually in the lowest regions of the Shell, often found himself in close proximity to this unpromising subject.

Ernest used not unfrequently to sit in Johnson’s

study of an evening between tea and chapel, during which time the construing lesson for next day had to be prepared. On one occasion Johnson had produced Bohn's translation of Xenophon by way of assisting their studies. Now Ernest knew that cribs were unlawful, and when he became aware of the character of the book a hot flush came over his face, and happening to put his hand in his waistcoat pocket he felt the pine-bark token, and instantly the remembrance of the last afternoon on Lewesdon Hill came into his mind. He got up from his chair, and facing his companion, he said :

‘Look here, Johnson, I can't stand cheating in work—that's a little too much. If you mean to use that crib I must hook it. I know I can't make any sense of the horrid stuff with only old Liddell and Scott to help me, but you won't catch me cribbing in a hurry.’

‘All right, my dear fellow, don't get excited. I don't want to cheat—I'm not likely to get the prize. It merely saves trouble. But I don't want to hurt your feelings. I'll look at it when you're gone. You can hammer away at your lexicon till you're sick, and I wish you joy of it. Meantime I'll read “Old St. Paul's.”’

Johnson kicked his lexicon across the room, and tilting his chair back on its hind-legs against the wall, began whistling no tune in particular, until the melody gradually died away as he became engrossed in the horrors of Chowles and Judith.

Johnson did not long stick to any book. His tastes did not incline towards literature. 'Old St. Paul's' soon shared the fate of the Greek lexicon, being hurled unceremoniously across the room, narrowly missing Ernest's head, and smashing the glass of a picture on the opposite wall.

'Look out, you idiot!' shouted Ernest, as he gave vent to a loud peal of laughter. Jumping up, he bounded towards Johnson, and taking hold of the two front legs of the tilted chair, he commenced raising them, which had the effect of lowering his friend head downwards. There was no escape, for the chair had a semicircular cage round the seat.

Johnson could only shriek with uproarious mirth, and gasp out his prayers for release; and as he wriggled and struggled the commotion assumed such noisy proportions that in another minute a heavy step was heard in the passage, and the door was immediately burst open with a sounding kick.

'What do you fellows mean by kicking up all this row? What are you doing, Fairfield? Let him get up. What's your prep? Xenophon? Hullo! that's how you do it, is it? You scoundrels! You crib, do you? We shall have to teach you manners, that's plain. You will hear about this to-morrow.'

So saying, the prefect George Armstrong took up the Bohn and went off without further remark, slamming the door after him.

Ernest had not as yet had any personal dealings

with the prefects, except so far as doing some minor details of fagging. Johnson had figured conspicuously in more than one escapade, which had the unpleasant result of an interview with that august tribunal. Ernest therefore regarded the prospect with some alarm, nor were his apprehensions allayed when Johnson said they were sure to be licked with the ground-ash. It was not so much the thought of castigation, as the sense of humiliation, which pressed heavily upon Ernest's mind. He chafed against the suspicion of underhand conduct, and was unwilling to submit to punishment not deserved. He might have gone and explained to Maurice, and secured his mediation, but he was too proud to resort to such a means of defence. He did not wish to incriminate Johnson, and so he resolved to let the matter take its course.

After evening chapel Maurice waylaid Ernest, and asked him to come to his study. Maurice had heard about the crib, and was anxious to hear Ernest's account of the transaction. He did not believe that Ernest would demean himself by cribbing, but perhaps pressure had been brought to bear, and the vision of Mrs. Fairfield rose up before Maurice's mind, and nerved him for the unpleasant task of questioning Ernest on the subject.

When they were in his study Maurice said :

'Armstrong told me what he found, Ernest. I'm awfully sorry you happened to be in Johnson's study at the time. I wish I could prevail upon you not to

have so much to do with Johnson and Co. I'm sure they are a bad lot.'

'Well, Maurice, you may set your mind at rest about the cribbing. I had nothing to do with the Bohn.'

'I never for a moment supposed you had, my dear fellow; but I'm sorry your name should be connected with Johnson's in such a business.'

'Well, it can't be helped now. Johnson's not such a bad fellow, after all. The masters don't like him, and he hasn't many friends; but he's a good-natured chap, and I don't think he'll do me any harm.'

'Well, I don't know, Ernest. I'm so awfully anxious that you should do well here, and that everyone should see that you are going to be A1, that I can't bear to think that some may say you are not starting in a promising way. You know what the doctor said the other day. You know I promised your mother to do my best to help you, Ernest, so you must not mind anything I say. I'm afraid you must think me a Methodist preacher.'

'Mind, my dear fellow? You are the best friend I have in the world, except mother and father. I know what you say is all right. But really, so far as I can see, Johnson is a very harmless sort of a chap. He's a bit of an ass, and does idiotic things; but that's the worst that can be said of him. And because he's kicked about from pillar to post, somehow I feel drawn towards him.'

‘Well, Ernest, I hope he won’t get you into any more mischief. Stick to it, and get up top of the Shell. I’m sure you can if you choose, and then you will not want to work with Johnson. Good-night.’

## CHAPTER V.

### THE AREOPAGUS, AND FOOTBALL.

NEXT day, between breakfast and school, Johnson and Ernest received command to come at once to the prefects' common-room. The summons was peremptory, and admitted of no delay. The two companions in adversity met at the door of the 'Areopagus,' as the council-chamber was popularly called. Each tried to grin an expression of condolence with the other, but on Johnson's part it was rather a dismal attempt. Johnson knew the taste of the ground-ash, and did not wish to make its further acquaintance. Ernest did not care much about a licking, but he was angry at having got into such a scrape, and was indignant at being implicated in a charge of cribbing. However, there was no possibility of escape, and whatever was to happen had better be got through as soon as possible. So, after a few whispered consultations, Johnson nudged Ernest, who knocked at the door of the common-room.

'Come in !'

Ernest opened the door and walked into the room, followed by Johnson. There were four prefects pre-

sent, among whom was conspicuous the senior, George Armstrong. He was a handsome-looking lad, strong-built, standing about five feet nine inches, with deep chest and broad shoulders, and his well-made clothes showed off his figure to perfection. He had black hair parted in the middle, dark piercing eyes, aquiline nose, and a mouth indicating decision, just fringed on the upper lip with an incipient black moustache. He was the sort of boy to win hero-worship in a school. When in a good temper, his face wore a radiant smile, but at times its expression was clouded with a dark and ominous look. Armstrong was standing by the fireplace, with one elbow resting on the mantelpiece, and he had the *Times* in his hand. He looked hard at the two boys as they entered. His glance was evaded by Johnson, but Ernest met it with unflinching gaze.

‘Come in, you two fellows. You were making a great row last night in the studies, and I caught you with a crib. You know well enough that we won’t stand that—cribbing, I mean. There was no name in the Bohn which I grilled, but I suppose it belonged to one of you. Have you got anything to say?’

Johnson was as pale as a ghost, and stood shivering in a piteous attitude. He hardly dared look up, and when he tried to speak no voice came. Ernest looked at his comrade in adversity, and could scarcely repress a smile. There was something comical in his abject distress, so unusual in one who was generally in a



happy-go-lucky state of spirits. And as he looked at Johnson, a strange sort of pity welled up in Ernest's heart for his friend; a hungry sense of sorrow stole over him, and a vision of home flashed across his mind, and a shiver seemed to run up his back and tingle in his face.

'Well, can't you speak?' said Armstrong, who had put down the *Times* and taken up a ground-ash stick that lay on the mantelpiece. 'I think you said last night that you were not using the crib, Fairfield?'

Before Ernest could answer, Johnson gasped out, in a thin, quavering voice:

'He didn't use it!'

'Come forward, then, you young scoundrel!' said Armstrong, gently tapping his boot with the ground-ash.

Johnson shuffled two steps to the front, and Armstrong, raising his arm, brought down the ash-stick with a sounding thwack across Johnson's shoulders. His bones were but ill-protected by flesh, and the luckless boy gave a great howl of anguish as he saw the arm uplifted for a second stroke. But in that instant a very different sound was heard. Two words were spoken—'Cowardly brute!'—and two blows were struck by Ernest, right and left, straight from the shoulder, full between the eyes of George Armstrong, which sent him backwards over a chair full length upon the floor. Ernest stood there, his teeth set, his

hands clenched, his face white with emotion. For a moment there was the silence of amazement. Then two of the prefects sprang forward and seized Ernest each by an arm, while the other two went to the assistance of Armstrong. As for Johnson, he could only stand open-mouthed, and forgot to writhe and rub his shoulders in the utter bewilderment of wonder.

Armstrong slowly rose to his feet, feeling considerably dazed by the overthrow. He pressed his hand upon his forehead, and breathed hard once or twice, and said :

‘I’ll just go and wash my face, you fellows. Keep Fairfield there till I come back.’

When he was gone the other prefects were not slow to speak, while Johnson, taking the favourable opportunity, slipped out unperceived.

‘What could have possessed you to do that, you fool? Were you mad? If we report you, you’ll be expelled straight off. If we don’t report you, you’ll just have as tight a thrashing as a fellow ever had in his life.’

Ernest saw at once that he had made a fool of himself. He had yielded to a sudden impulse without a moment’s consideration of the consequences. He was glad to have saved Johnson a licking, but as he stood there before the indignation of outraged authority, he recognised the rashness of his conduct.

‘I’m sorry,’ he said; ‘I never thought what I was doing. I felt mad. I am awfully sorry.’

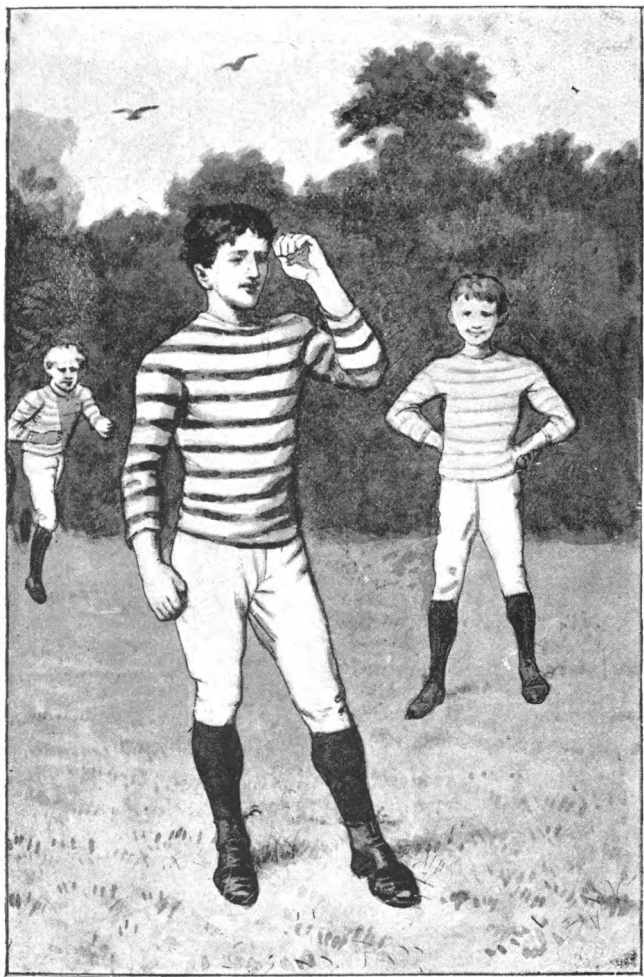
At this juncture Armstrong returned, his face much swollen, and with the promise of two black eyes for some time to come. He shut the door, and then walked up to Ernest. The other prefects waited for him to speak.

‘I’m sorry you should have knocked me down, Fairfield, because it was altogether an unconstitutional proceeding, as you probably know, and I shall have to give you as good a licking as you ever had. Stand round!’

There was no evasion. Memnon the Resolute was roused. Ernest was vanquished in the cause, and had the sense to offer no resistance. He instantly stood round, and received across his shoulders twenty cuts with the ground-ash as hard as the mighty Armstrong could let them in. Ernest bore the chastisement without a sound, and when it was over, being commanded to leave the room, he left.

It was a matter of no small excitement in the school when Johnson’s report of the proceedings had been spread. His fairly unvarnished account had been passed from mouth to mouth, and received various embellishments during the process; and when next Armstrong appeared in public he was an object of curiosity to all the boys. He came out into the playground as usual at the quarter-hour, when there was generally a friendly game of football, in which high and low, prefect and fag, mingled in amicable strife. Armstrong was the acknowledged champion. There





“Was that a goal, you fellows? I can't see quite as clearly as usual this morning.”  
See page 59.

was no one who could touch him in feats of strength and agility. He was secure in the consciousness of his power, and so he just mingled in the fray as if nothing had happened. He even encouraged chaff, for when the opposite side scored a goal he curved his forefinger and thumb into the position of an eyeglass, and peered in the direction of the posts and asked :

‘ Was that a goal, you fellows ? I can’t see quite as clearly as usual this morning.’

This sally was received with a general laugh, and someone expressed the popular feeling by calling out, ‘ Three cheers for Armstrong !’ which was instantly responded to with thundering applause, no voice being more lustily exerted than that of Ernest Fairfield. Armstrong’s face glowed with satisfaction as he took off his cap, and bowed with a jocose affectation of imperial dignity. He was eager for popularity, and nothing pleased him more than such spontaneous testimony to the fact that he was appreciated and admired. He had his failings, like every other mortal, and if ever I write his history (as I hope some day to do) it will be seen that this trait had its influence upon his character.

But if on this occasion Armstrong was accredited with having done no more than his duty, there were not wanting many boys who magnified the heroism of Ernest in befriending Johnson. In Johnson’s eyes Ernest was as great a hero as the Duke of Well-

ington. Johnson did not weary of telling the tale of his rescue, and he was as proud of his friendship with Ernest as the proverbial peacock. For several days afterwards he would make a parade of his admiration which Ernest could not resent, though he had rather too much of it. Johnson would link his arm in Ernest's, and saunter with him about the playground, and lead him where he pleased, as we may have seen a mirthful puppy lead a retriever along by the ear. And under Ernest's wing Johnson found opportunity for advancing in the social scale, until he even attained to some influence among the more respectable section of the community. But he continued, as before, an idle, disreputable fellow, and it would be difficult to analyze Ernest's motives for keeping up such close intimacy with him. He had seen enough of him to know that he was thoroughly unprincipled, and it did not require Maurice's intervention to convince him that such a character is not desirable in an intimate friend.

Meantime the days were growing shorter, and the term was passing on, and Ernest was thoroughly enjoying life out of school hours. He was an enthusiast at football, and had been playing up in splendid style in class matches and trial games, which formed a preparation for the important college matches which came on towards the end of term. Ernest was captain of the Shell Fifteen, a distinction never before attained by a new boy. But he had proved himself far the best

player, understanding the game thoroughly. He had distinguished himself in the earlier games, and had won the commendation of the College Fifteen, who recommended him as captain of his class, and so he had been elected to that important post *nemine contradicente*. Under his leadership the Shell had beaten a team of the junior classes. It had also beaten the Lower Fifth by two goals to a try, and had played a drawn game with the Upper Fifth; and now the Shell folk were in a state of fermentation at the prospect of playing a team of the Lower Sixth and Upper Fifth combined—the former class only numbering ten members. Ernest was in great excitement about the game. The Lower Sixth boasted four members of the College Fifteen in its ranks, which formed a solid element of strength. But with the exception of these their team did not show much talent, and the Shell happened at this period to contain five or six great hulking fellows whose bodies were out of all proportion to their brains. Ernest had instilled some of his spirit into these burly men, and prevailed upon them to regulate their diet on training principles, and take daily runs to improve their wind. Furthermore, victory had fired the Shell with the explosive enthusiasm of success, and so, when this important game was proposed, it was supported by universal acclaim.

The challenge came from the Lower Sixth in this wise. It was Thursday in the last week of October.



Afternoon lessons were over, and the freedom of unbridled tumult was supplanting the restraint of studious decorum. Some of the Shell-fish were standing round the fire; others were sky-larking over the desks. Ernest was talking football-shop with the burly men. The class-room door was open, and Johnson had just shuffled in with his usual attempt at swagger and importance. No one took any notice of him until the attention of everyone was arrested by a shrill tarantara! Looking round, they saw the insignificant form of that saucy youth standing erect on the master's desk, with a newspaper screwed round into the shape of a trumpet, from which proceeded the martial blast. It was not until two grammars and a lexicon had been successively and successfully shied at that presumptuous upstart that he was prevailed upon to cease his trumpeting and address himself to the important business thus heralded forth. This he did in a shrill squeaky voice, holding before him a quarter-sheet of school paper, from which he read the following announcement:

‘To all whom it may concern, notice is hereby given, that the Lower Sixth and Upper Fifth have conspired together to issue a challenge to the honourable society of the Shell, to meet them on the college ground in a game of football next Saturday at half-past two. In witness whereof behold this paper, whereon the challenge is inscribed.’

There was a rush from the fireplace to the master's

desk, and a race for the prize of the paper. Johnson, in the scuffle that ensued, got bowled over, and alighted somewhere under the desks. The paper, much crumpled, was eventually handed to Ernest, who pored over it with extreme relish; and amid repeated acclamations of assent it was unanimously resolved to accept the challenge, and a formal acceptance was promptly drawn up on a similar quarter-sheet of school paper, and conveyed by Johnson to the headquarters of the Lower Sixth.

‘That’s all right,’ said Ernest, rubbing his hands and dancing a minuet. ‘We’ll play up like maniacs, and wire in with all our might, you fellows! Let’s see; to-day is Thursday, we shall play the day after to-morrow. Atkinson is æger; who can we get to play instead?’

‘Well, there’s not much choice,’ said one of the heavy dragoons; ‘either Dormer, or Shorthouse, or Johnson; there’s no one else. Which shall it be?’

‘It will not make much difference,’ said Ernest. ‘I dare say Johnson would render as good an account of himself as either of the other two, though he’s about as much at home in a scrimmage as a cat in a swimming-bath. Shall it be Johnson? Then Johnson let it be.’

When Johnson returned from his embassy he was informed that he had been selected to fill the vacancy in the Shell team for that important match.

‘Just you mind you play up, young cad,’ said one

of the burly men. 'You will have to play back on the left, and if they get a try on your side you'll be flayed alive, so look out!'

Considerable excitement reigned throughout the college in anticipation of this match. There was no other game of interest for that Saturday, and so it commanded undivided attention.

There was a goodly gathering of spectators ranged round the ground as the two teams gradually came upon the arena in twos and threes, until all were assembled in their places. The Sixth wore dark blue jerseys, the Shell white jerseys striped with blue.

Never had Ernest felt so keenly excited in prospect of a game. Not only was he anxious for his side to win, but it seemed generally understood that if his own individual play was brilliant he would be elected to fill the vacant place in the College Fifteen. It would be an unheard-of thing for a fellow to get into THE FIFTEEN his first term, and Ernest's ambition was stirred.

See him, then, standing half-back, having just marshalled his men in their places. He is, indeed, a splendid-looking young fellow! Never does a boy look more to advantage than when his soul is energizing his body in a game of football, that is, if nature has cut him out for a football-player. Some boys never look more out of their element than in the football-field; but given a strong, well-built, athletic figure, given a boy who can run like Asahel,

with the fleetness of a roe, one who can prove what is meant by power in motion—given one whose ambitions are centred upon football—and nowhere will he be seen to greater advantage than in his favourite pastime. Such was Ernest.

And now the game had begun. It was a fast game, contested by superb energy on both sides. It began with a vigorous scrimmage in the centre of the ground, the forwards locked together in a surging phalanx, exerting their utmost effort in a common cause. Surely that is a grand sight! trivial the object, but glorious the manifestation of absolute energy devoted to a cause.

Mighty was the pushing on both sides; heads thrown forward, arms circling round backs, chests heaving and groaning with exertion, every muscle strained to extreme tension. For a time the ball was almost stationary in the midst of the striving, struggling host. Then the equilibrium was disturbed, and the ball moved. The Sixth bear on, the phalanx breaks up, the ball bounds forward towards the other goal. Ernest has relieved the pressure by a short but brilliant run more than once, but has not yet found his opportunity. And so on, amid the usual vicissitudes of scrimmages and runs, neither side gaining any point before half-time was called.

The burly men had fought the battle nobly, and Ernest was exultant at their negative success. They had not scored, but they had warded off the vigorous

onslaughts of the foe. His side had had the disadvantage of playing uphill with the sun in their eyes, and the wind against them. Now with the change of goal they might reasonably hope for decided advantage. He encouraged his men to 'stick to it like niggers,' and put forth their very best endeavours, and certainly he backed up his precepts by example. 'Well played, Fairfield! go it, Shell!' such shouts were frequently heard.

And now half the remaining half of the game had passed, and still nothing decisive had been gained. The pace had told upon several players on either side, and there was an obvious falling-off in the tremendous vigour of the conflict. The Sixth were managing to keep the ball in their opponents' quarters despite the loss of advantage by change of direction. They were getting dangerously near the Shell goal. Then Ernest had his opportunity at last. Getting hold of the ball, he ran, dodging three of the Sixth at the outset, running half-way down the ground at his swiftest speed, amid tremendous cheering. On he speeds, avoiding one opponent after another by dashing energy and supreme skill. On, on! now he is within the twenty-five; the backs are passed; nothing before him but the goal; no one can touch him; he carries the ball behind and touches it down between the posts. Thunders of applause greeted this splendid run. Beyond a doubt his promotion into the FIFTEEN was secured.

The 'place-kick' was assigned to Kingdon, who generally undertook that important duty for the Shell. Never had an easier kick fallen to his lot. No wind, no sun to balk him, the ball straight in front of the goal. But, alas for the fickleness of fortune! Kingdon knit his brows, and measured the distance with his eye, and gave his directions to the placer with the utmost nicety; he loaded his right leg, and sung out, 'All right; put her down!' He kicked, and the ball just did not pass between the posts. Ernest bit his lip with vexation and disappointment, but comforted himself with the thought that only five minutes' play remained, and the others were not likely to get anything in that short space. Ah, but there is an old adage, 'the game is not lost till it is won.' The issues of a great battle have possibly been decided ere now in five minutes. On the part of the Sixth it was the despairing effort of forlorn hope. They got the ball for the last time within the Shell 'twenty-five.' It was caught up by A, overhauled by B, grabbed at by C, passed on to D, who was collared by E. There was tight scrimmaging and loose scrimmaging, and what followed took less than one minute.

Davison, the smallest and feeblest player on the Sixth side, suddenly found the ball in his hands. How it came there he could not tell. It was no fault of his—he had done nothing all through the game but keep on the outskirts of the conflict and get in the way of his own side. Anyhow, in the last minute of the

game he found the ball in his hands. Johnson was near him, and should have collared him in half a second. But he made no pretence of an attempt to do so. Davison saw the posts above him: he had never made a drop-kick in his life: he didn't want the ball, but in a flurried manner he dropped it and gave a spasmodical kick.

The ball rose in the air, and sailed gracefully over the crossbar!

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SONG OF THE HOOPOE.

THE Sixth were no less amused than elated by their victory, and their triumphant shouts were spiced with an accent of derisive mirth, which was peculiarly irritating to the nerves of their opponents. That last episode which finally decided the game had been enacted in the last minute. It was a curious conclusion to a spirited contest, and most exasperating to the side which lost. The burly men among the Shell-folk were loud in their expressions of disgust against that pusillanimous poltroon Johnson, and Ernest could not restrain his violent indignation any better than the others. But his wrath was pacified that evening when Armstrong came to his study and complimented him on his good play, and said that the committee had elected him to fill the vacancy in the Fifteen. The late unpleasantness between these two was forgiven and forgotten, and Armstrong generously sympathized with Ernest's proud delight at the honour bestowed upon him.

The Monday following that Saturday is connected in my old diary of those times with an incident which had important issues in Ernest's history.



The class-room in which the Shell pursued their studies and prepared their work was a well-proportioned room, with an ordinary master's desk at one end, and a massive chair with a drawer under the seat. At the opposite end of the room were three rows of desks and forms ; and in front of the master's desk was a roomy semicircular form, at which the boys sat when engaged in a lesson.

On that Monday morning the class was assembled for a lesson in Homer. Mr. Raikes, the master, had just entered the room, and was in the act of restoring order to the somewhat unruly spirits before him. He had only arrived that term, and had had no previous experience in managing and instructing boys, and the Shell was not the pleasantest kind of form on which to begin practising. Consequently it may be understood that Mr. Raikes did not often draw a comparison between the dusty floor of the class-room and the asphodel meadows of Homer's Elysium.

'Now then, get out your lexicons and prepare twenty lines. No more noise !'

There was a considerable banging of lids of desks by way of prelude to the execution of these commands. The boys were allowed to work together. They did so mostly in pairs, sharing the toil on strictly co-operative principles. One looked out the words, while the other made out the sense. Occasionally when both partners were keen about the work, each armed himself with a lexicon and looked out words.

Ernest and Johnson were snugly ensconced together with their classical artillery, prepared for action. The battery was not very efficiently provided—only one Homer and one lexicon between them. Ernest, as being gifted with the greater physical strength, tackled the lexicon; while Johnson, flattering himself on his intellectual superiority, took upon him the office of squeezing out the sense.

They had got through two lines, and now Johnson announced the word *popoi* as requiring solution. Ernest fumbled away at the pages, and after eyeing the *pop* words up and down, and fingering them affectionately during the process, finally spotted the culprit.

‘Oh, I say, it’s *the cry of the hoopoe*! What in the world are they up to? Here, let us see the stuff. Juno must be drunk! “*O, the cry of the hoopoe, shall we . . . shall we . . . while the long-eared Greeks—*” ’

‘Long-haired, you fool!’ interposed Johnson, who carried on the work by a whispered commentary. ‘Oh, I cannot stand this rot! I shall ask old Raikes how a hoopoe sings. It can’t mean that the idiotic bird takes out its pocket-handkerchief and blubbers like a baby.’

‘Don’t be a fool,’ said Ernest; ‘you will only get a hundred lines.’

‘Bosh! I will, though!’

And, waiting for a lull, Johnson stood up at his desk, and in his squeaky voice called out:

‘Please, sir, how does a hoopoe sing?’

The boys looked up, and turned their eyes first upon Johnson and then towards Mr. Raikes. Some laughed. Ernest lost all control over his risible inclinations, and burst out into a clattering volley of laughter, which he vainly strove to choke by stuffing his handkerchief into his mouth.

Mr. Raikes, who was engaged in correcting exercises, put up his *pince-nez* and looked in the direction of the voice.

‘What do you mean by that impertinence? You will stay in afterwards and write out the lesson.’

‘Please, sir, I don’t mean to be impertinent at all, sir. It’s Homer, sir. D’you know, sir, Juno says, sir, “O song of the hoopoe, why do the long-eared Greeks go for the Trojans with——”’

‘Will you sit down and hold your tongue? I shall report you to the Doctor for insolence.’

Johnson sat down for a moment, and then, taking up his Homer, he deliberately left his desk and walked up to Mr. Raikes.

‘Please, sir, may I go out of the room? I wish to see the Doctor.’

‘Certainly not. Go and sit down!’

‘I don’t see why I should have an imposition for nothing, and I mean to show the Doctor that it’s what Homer says.’

‘Will you be quiet and sit down in your place? Fairfield, how dare you laugh in that audacious manner? You must stay behind and write out the

lesson too. You two boys demoralize the class. I shall send a note to the Doctor at once.'

This was a serious development of the matter. Johnson subsided and walked back to his seat, hoping to appease the wrath of the offended master by apparent submission to his authority. But Mr. Raikes' blood was up, and having hastily written a note, he requested the senior boy to take it.

Dr. Saunderson was occupied with the Upper Sixth. They were construing a chorus of the Agamemnon, and the Doctor was in high fettle, doing his best to elicit those nice distinctions of scholarship so dear to the soul of a classical first-class man. To interrupt him at such a moment was equivalent to snatching a bone from a ravenous lion. At the sound of a knock at the door the Doctor's brow contracted, and his tongue thundered forth :

'Come in !'

Simpkins Major entered, and bowing deferentially, handed the note to the head-master. He read it, and mumbled to himself the words, 'Tiresome idiots!' and then, commanding the class to look out any words they did not know, he hastened out of the room. Stopping at a certain cupboard in the passage, he opened it and selected a cane, and thus armed he strode on towards the class-room. Into that room he burst like a whirlwind, and stood trembling with fury.

'Why can't you silly fellows behave yourselves ?'

Come here, Fairfield and Johnson. What do you mean by your impertinence? Stand round!

There followed a dozen strokes with the cane across the shoulders of Fairfield, who set his teeth hard and did not actually utter a cry, though he winced under the terrific chastisement, and his jacket was cut. Johnson had no champion to defend him this time, and the poor skinny wretch, after the first two cuts, grovelled on the floor and howled for mercy. The Doctor was not to be balked of his prey. He seized him up by the arm and held him at length, and gave him his share with interest. At last he finished, and the miserable youth went back blubbing to his seat. The Doctor said nothing more, but left the room, banging the door after him.

Mr. Raikes was considerably distressed at the severity of the punishment. He seemed quite unnerved, and could hardly get through the lesson, and when it was over he quickly put away his books, and hurried off to calm his agitated feelings in the privacy of his own apartment.

The boys were not slow to talk over what had taken place.

'I say, didn't he just swish into them! Fairfield, you stood it like a Trojan; but, by Jove! if I were you, I'd send old Sandy in a bill for a new jacket—it's cut into strips. Poor young Johnson! He's got no flesh on his bones. It was an awful shame to thrash him so unmercifully. But when the old gentleman's

blood is up he would as soon flog a fellow to death as look at him. He wants the society for suppressing cruelty to animals on his war-trail!"

Such remarks were freely indulged; and if the matter had been debated in the House of Commons, possibly it might have been proved that there were at least two good sides to the question.

Now I will ask the gentle reader's kind indulgence for a very short digression—the first, I think, which has yet interrupted the outspreading of my tale; and if I promise him that such an indiscretion shall hardly occur again, perhaps he will consent to finish the paragraph. Experience convinces me that school-stories are, as a rule, more popular with boys than any others; yet never, perhaps, is a school-story given to the public but some reviewer suggests that it puts boys up to foolish and mischievous practices. The author may studiously endeavour to counterbalance every scrape and misdemeanour with suitable penalties and unhappy consequences, but in spite of all he renders himself liable to critical expostulation and censure. Alas! what is he to do? It is a misfortune of school-life in stories that any description of the ordinary routine, omitting all indiscreet and questionable conduct, might sound dull and uninteresting. Were I to write a faithful record of the day's doings at St. Andrew's College from week to week as regarded the generality of the boys, interspersed with records of cricket and football, it might fall under the charge of

monotony, like Mark Twain's diary: 'Got up, dressed, went to bed: got up, dressed, went to bed.' The conclusion arrived at is, that if a school-story has to be written with the hope of finding readers, it must contain much that savours of scrapes, and it will be well if that be not too mild a term. As with nations, so with schoolboys. Someone has suggested that all history is the record of a nation's wars—that happy is the nation which has no history. And possibly for most of us who are able to look back upon school-days, if we were well-behaved boys, and worked hard, and went on in the orthodox manner, and kept out of foolish scrapes, the remembrance is blurred and devoid of particular character. This is such as it should be. Happy is the man who, as he looks back, finds no history of his schooldays!

After this escapade Johnson clung to Ernest more persistently than ever, and often expressed his fear that now Ernest was a swell in the Fifteen he would have nothing more to say to him. Ernest had not the heart to intimate that Johnson's attentions might be less pressing, and that it misbecame a member of the Fifteen to be concerned in foolish scrapes. There was one important scheme which Johnson had formed, and he was minded to take Ernest into confidence and enlist him as a colleague in carrying it out. It had reference to the fifth of November.

The boys at St. Andrew's College were allowed to have fireworks, and, more strange still to relate, they

were allowed to make them, in the year of which I am writing. Of all the extraordinary stretches of school discipline this surely was pre-eminent. I could not believe it, only that it happens to be an item of authentic history, to corroborate which I could bring a host of witnesses if necessary. It was never allowed afterwards, as was only natural, for during the fortnight before the fifth hardly a night passed without an explosion of some sort. Every study was transformed for the time being into an arsenal; the thump and thud of hammering sounded behind every door.

The principal article of manufacture was squibs. Some boy introduced the method, and, like the rabbits in Australia, from a humble beginning the pest multiplied with alarming rapidity. The carpenters drove a thriving trade in supplying rammers and mallets. There was a rivalry about the number and size of the squibs turned out. Hundreds—I might almost say thousands—were manufactured, varying from the dimensions of a large pencil to those of a small cannon. Woolwich Arsenal was nowhere! If you did not blow up your neighbour, he was sure to blow you up: if you did not complete your half-dozen between tea and chapel, honour compelled you to sit up afterwards till they were done. Why, a master actually took as an excuse for a copy of verses not finished that the author was making squibs, and hadn't time!



Johnson had got hold of a catalogue of fireworks supplied by a London firm, and his scheme was to get up a subscription for purchasing something more worthy of the popular anniversary than mere squibs.

‘Look here, Ernest, look at this catalogue. Just listen! Asteroid rockets, jewelled fountains, mine with Bengal lights discharging a cloud of fiery serpents, devil-among-the-tailors—a most exciting piece of pyrotechny. Ha! ha! I should think so—just the very thing to put under old Raikes’ chair when he’s in one of his rages! Chinese fire-crackers, Gold Chop, Chung Wow. Now, look here, Fairfield; what we must do is to get some of the chaps to subscribe, and we’ll have down an assortment of these exciting pieces of pyrotechny. I’m sure they’d like it, and it will be a feature in the evening’s entertainment, as the conjuror said, when he produced a cabbage out of a gentleman’s silk hat. What do you think of the plan?’

‘Awfully good. I’ll give five bob.’

‘So will I—that’s a beginning. We’ll get a book and stick down what each fellow gives. You must ask them; you’re the gentleman of the company. They wouldn’t give me as many halfpence as kicks.’

So it was settled that Ernest should undertake the task of canvassing for subscriptions. Johnson, who wrote a good copy-book hand, drew up a programme of the various fireworks he proposed to get, and

gave it to Ernest together with the small book for entering the names and contributions of subscribers. He also admonished him to employ his most persuasive arguments and swell the fund to his utmost capacity.

The result of the enterprise was highly satisfactory, and when the day arrived for closing the list Ernest was able to hand over to Johnson the imposing sum of four pounds eighteen shillings and sixpence. Johnson congratulated him on his successful diplomacy, and said he ought to be Chancellor of the Exchequer; and that afternoon Johnson made out a list of goods required, which he duly forwarded with a post-office order to the manufactory. It was announced that each subscriber should receive a certain quantity of squibs, crackers, and catherine-wheels, according to the amount of his subscription, while a splendid assortment of rockets and Roman candles and set-pieces as described in the programme should be purchased up to the sum subscribed.

Then someone suggested the preparation of Guy Fawkes and effigies, and the idea was at once adopted. A numerous array of the most hideous masked monsters was constructed. Old jackets and trousers were freely supplied—nay, it was hinted that not one or two bolsters were surreptitiously pressed into the service—and upwards of seventy figures were registered on the official list, each with its appropriate name. The prefects had obtained Dr. Saunderson's consent to

the fiery festival. They were to be held responsible for all things being done in a manner consistent with the safety of life and property. They arranged the order of the entertainment, and issued special instructions and rules for the insurance of safety. One rule was that no one should put a lighted squib down his neighbour's back, or into his pocket, nor eke a cracker.

The official scheme of the carnival was as follows : First was to come off a general sham-fight representing the siege of Sebastopol, in which, from two opposite sides of the playground, all the squibs made on the premises were to be let off. This general fizzment was to be varied by rockets and Roman candles provided by the liberality of the Areopagus. Then was to follow a special display of the fireworks provided by the Johnsonian subscribers ; and the proceedings were to be concluded by a grand masquerade of guys. These were to be carried round the playground in a torchlight procession, to the accompaniment of songs and choruses. They were then to be arranged round the bonfire in the centre of the playground, the whole school assisting at the general flare-up. This part of the entertainment was to represent the burning of Rome (some Roman candles being specially set apart as appropriate illuminants for the occasion), and Maurice, the famous fiddler, was commanded to dress himself up as Nero, and perform on his fiddle during the conflagration, while the seventy guys, being set

ablaze, were to represent the famous 'living torches' of history.

It will be readily understood that the advent of the fifth was awaited with no small excitement by the young gentlemen of St. Andrew's College.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER.

DURING the last few days the relations between Mr. Raikes and Johnson had been decidedly strained. Ernest had held aloof and given no further cause for offence; but Johnson had assumed an air of injured innocence, and took every opportunity of expressing his ill-will.

Mr. Raikes had at times a humorous way of trying to extract jokes from the lessons. He would occasionally tell a quaint story, at which the boys were intended to laugh; but as often as not the big dunces would put on a stolid stare, as though they failed to see anything amusing, and then, amid profound silence, the master would blush and clear his throat, and feel sorry he spoke.

On the morning of the fourth, Johnson had come into class in a very untidy and disreputable state. He had been finishing off the last of his squibs, and had taken off not only his jacket, but his collar and tie, to expedite his movements. He was very hot, and galloped off begrimed with gunpowder five minutes after the bell, buttoning his collar as he burst into the

class-room. The other boys were preparing a lesson of Ovid, and as Johnson bustled and panted with unnecessary noise to his place, he disturbed the general order of the class.

Mr. Raikes, elevating his *pince-nez*, eyed the last arrival with a frown.

‘You are late, Johnson, and you are very untidy. You actually have no necktie! I cannot allow this; you must write out one hundred times the words, *A necktie collo annecti debet*. For fear you should misunderstand the precept, I will write it down for you.’

Mr. Raikes flattered himself that this was the happiest pun he had ever made; and for once his attempt at wit was appreciated. The big boys began to giggle, and one faintly clapped, and another gently stamped, and gradually from *piano* the applause *crescendoed* to *fortissimo*. Vainly did Mr. Raikes try to assuage the tumult, which only abated when the applauders were exhausted, and the preparation was continued.

At the appointed time dictionaries were put away, and the boys took their places for the lesson. They hammered and tonged over the lines, blundering the quantities, murdering the Latin, shooting at the English, and vexing the soul of their master right sore. Towards the close of the lesson it was Johnson’s turn to go on, and he fell into a pitfall at the very first line.

‘*Tene, sacer vates, flammæ rapuere rogales?* Hold, sacred poet——’

‘*Hold?*’ said Mr. Raikes, with a scowl of contempt; ‘why, you are making two false quantities over the first word!’

Johnson looked intently at the word to see what insidious mischief could possibly be lurking under its plausible and apparently innocent exterior. Ah! it suddenly occurred to him that *tene* was compounded of *te* and *ne*. So he corrected himself with a bounce and said:

‘Do not, sacred poet——’

‘There goes a third false quantity,’ screamed the master; ‘three false quantities in a word of two syllables! who could believe it? You ought to be senior classic some day, Johnson!’

The class again greeted this facetious sally with boisterous applause. They roared and shrieked with laughter. The burly men bent forward and held their sides, and patted one another on the back, and pointed the finger of scorn at Johnson. Mr. Raikes could not forbear a smile of complaisant satisfaction, though he knew too well that this riotous explosion of mirth was only an excuse for impertinence. He felt that in future he must restrain his wit, as being too intoxicating for the spirits of his class.

Johnson did not appreciate the fun. He could not stand being made the laughing-stock of the class. He pouted and blushed as red as his pale complexion

could blush, and collapsed in tears, hiding his face behind his book.

When lesson was over he had a lively time of it with the big members of the Shell.

‘You are a young blubbering baby!’ said the gigantic Norman, sauntering up to him arm-in-arm with Ernest. ‘But who can be surprised when you funk a fellow half your size at football? I wish you were a football I’d kick you over the moon!’ An indignant kick followed these remarks; and Ernest could not refrain from a disdainful smile. Any allusion to that game of football was gall and wormwood to him.

Johnson had seen ever since the loss of that match that Ernest despised and snubbed him; and feelings of jealous hatred against Ernest for his popularity and success began to creep into Johnson’s heart. And as he mooned about the field after that interview with Ernest and Norman, brooding over his evil thoughts, he resolved to pay out both Ernest and Mr. Raikes the next day.

The box of fireworks had arrived, and Johnson had unpacked it in the privacy of his study. He would not let even Ernest be present, for the fact was Johnson had appropriated half the money subscribed, and only expended the other half upon fireworks. He said nothing about the arrival of the box till the next morning, when the subscribers were invited to come to his study and receive their allotments. There was grumbling in no measured terms over the distribu-



tion ; but Johnson, who had hidden the more important goods, told them to 'hold their jaw until they had seen the magnificent marvels in store for the grand display.'

'By how much the less you receive now, you fools, by so much the more shall you see this evening, as we say in the classics. Ah, but you grovelling idiots do not appreciate the beauties of Homer—"then up stood all the long-eared Greeks, and sang the song of the hoopoe"!' and Johnson whistled an imitation of that warbler's melody with comical grimaces, by way of cajoling the disappointed traders.

'It's bosh you fellows thinking you have not got enough ; why, these squibs will make twice the fizz of those rotten things the chaps have made—and then the rockets, and turribilions, and devil-among-the-tailors ! Oh, they will be proper !'

The discontented crew went off, and reserved their judgment till after the performance should be over.

It grew dark and cloudy towards four o'clock, and promised well for the evening. There was to be no preparation, and the whole time between tea and chapel was to be devoted to fireworks.

Within five minutes of the rush out of hall after tea the signal for the commencement of the display was raised. A gigantic squib, home-made, was planted securely in a flower-pot and elevated on a stand in the middle of the playground. It did not prove altogether a success. For when a trembling hand

ignited the touch-paper, while all the boys stood round with eyes intently fixed upon the infinitesimal spark, it seemed such an age of waiting that various uncomplimentary remarks were passed. The maker said it was all right; the touch-paper was rather damp. The spark at last fairly disappeared, and the fabricator of the engine felt called upon to take stringent measures to retrieve his reputation. He went cautiously up, evidently doubting the honesty of his squib's intentions. What if it should be playing dark—treacherously intent on luring him to destruction? He advanced with a lighted *porte-feu* and carefully relit the blue paper. It gave a slight spit and a fizzle. He drew back with haste. All eyes glared upon the spark, which grew dimmer and dimmer, and finally went out. A groan of disgust broke from the eager circle of spectators.

Smythe senior grew desperate. At all hazards the 'infernal machine' should go off! Once more he approached with his *porte-feu*, and rammed it down upon the touch-paper till the top of the squib was actually burning like a torch. Still there were no symptoms of a genuine eruption.

Ah! it's beginning! A slight cheer greeted two spasmodic fizzes. Smythe senior was just in time as he made a rush for safety. There was a flash and a report like the bursting of an eighty-four-ton gun, and then the blackness of darkness, while the vault of heaven seemed to be raining fragments of flower-

pot, paper, and volcanic dust. It was a mercy no lives were lost! Shouts of applause mingled with derision and laughter attended this result, and it was decided not to risk another attempt at a formal opening of the proceedings.

The prefects announced that the siege of Sebastopol might commence.

Then there was mounting in hot haste, and at all quarters sparks sprung into flame; there were fizzes, and fiery sputterings, and manifold bangs. Many of the home-made squibs were highly successful, and although from a military point of view the siege operations were not conducted with much method in attack or skill in defence, still the ardour of the combatants was keen, the merriment furious, and the laughter loud. The smell of battle was strong, and clouds of sulphurous smoke hung round the college buildings, and night was made day by reason of the multitude and magnitude of explosive combustibles. This first part of the evening's entertainment lasted upwards of an hour, and was only concluded when ammunition failed.

Then the prefects sent up half a score of rockets in succession, which called forth various expressions of admiration. And afterwards Johnson's opportunity arrived. His clients had gathered round him, and he asked them to help him bring the things out.

They all adjourned to Johnson's study and brought out about ten rockets, six Roman candles, two com-

binations, and a tourbillon, also one of those fantastic specimens of pyrotechny entitled 'devil-among-the-tailors.'

'Is that all?' asked one of the subscribers.

'All? Yes; isn't it enough? You don't suppose you can get these things for nothing, do you? Come on.'

The rockets were certainly splendid, and took the shine out of those provided by the prefects. The set pieces did not perform their part with good grace—getting stuck at the critical moment, and shooting out cataracts of coloured flame at odd corners. The tourbillon whirled upwards in gallant style, and the diabolical intruder among the makers of tail-coats exploded in orthodox fashion, flinging its shower of crackers far into the air.

Johnson concluded his share of the entertainment by a fire-balloon, which they managed to inflate without catastrophe. It rose majestically and sailed away, trailing a magnesium light in its wake, which ascended in a spiral line, leaving behind a column of dense white smoke.

And then all hands turned to the procession of guys and the burning of Rome. The guys were carried round the playground in imposing procession, to the accompaniment of vocal choruses, shouted with more regard to noise than melody.

Maurice, in the character of Nero, wore knickerbockers without stockings, and a sheet arranged

around his person in graceful folds. A laurel-wreath encircled his head, and he stood by the huge pile of faggots which would shortly be a blazing bonfire, while the pageant deployed before. He fiddled away right imperially, varying the performance by dancing an impromptu hornpipe to keep his bare legs warm. The guys were posted in position, and their respective owners set them alight; the bonfire was kindled, and the fiddling waxed louder as the flames uprose.

In the midst of these proceedings Johnson came up to Ernest, and, touching him on the arm, beckoned him away. Then, in a cautious whisper, he said:

‘Come on; I want you just for half a minute.’

‘What’s up?’

‘Oh, nothing particular. I won’t keep you two jiffs.’

Taking Ernest’s arm, Johnson hurried him away from the assembled host across the playground to a small courtyard in the rear of the college buildings.

‘What on earth do you want me for?’ asked Ernest, who was anxious not to miss any of the fun.

‘Oh, I will not keep you half a moment; just stand there and sing out gently if anyone comes along.’

Ernest was stationed at a corner of this courtyard where two passages entered it from the adjacent buildings. Johnson stealthily hastened on, and then stopped. Within half a minute of his stopping, Ernest heard the familiar sound of a rocket gathering strength for flight. He turned round and saw the rocket start

on its career, and the next moment there was a crash of broken glass as the fiery monster rushed through one of the upper windows which faced the courtyard.

Johnson just waited to make sure of the result, and then calling Ernest to come on, he ran off again towards the playground.

‘What on earth did you do that for, you young ass?’ said Ernest, as he ran beside him.

‘Oh, it’s all right—it’s only old Raikes’ room. I wanted to pay him out, that’s all.’

‘Well, there will be a thundering row about it, and, as usual, you’ve tried to get me into it. I tell you I’m sick of all your tomfoolery. You are the biggest little idiot in the school, and I’ll have nothing more to do with you in future.’

So saying, Ernest bestowed an indignant kick upon his comrade, and then walked off.

Johnson was in a furious passion, and called after him:

‘Who cares for you, you great ass! You think a mighty lot of yourself, but I’ll be even with you. I’ll pay you out!’

Mr. Raikes was reposing in his arm-chair, with a pipe in his mouth and a novel on a book-rest in front of him. He was taking it easy after the fatigues of the day, and congratulating himself, as he heard the distant bangs and cheers, that he was not responsible for the results of the evening’s celebration. He felt that the wealth of Cræsus would not suffice to induce

him at that moment to change places with Dr. Saunderson.

Cuthbert Raikes, B.A., of Trinity College, Cambridge, had done great and learned things as an undergraduate at the university; and as he sat comfortably with slippered feet on the fender, and watched the blue smoke curl upwards from his pipe, his thoughts went back to many an evening so spent in his dear old college rooms, where he had often meditated ambitious schemes of future distinction. He passed his hand over the crown of his head, and sighed as it reminded him that his hair was already beginning to grow scanty in that locality. He glanced his eye towards the book-shelf, where his beloved mathematical books were ranged in ordered line. He felt that his light was hidden under a bushel in his present condition, his talents wasted, his genius degraded. He had accepted the mastership as a stepping-stone to fame. Dr. Saunderson had said he wished him to work up the senior boys in higher mathematics, and take light classical work among the junior classes. And what did the higher mathematics comprise? Why, the most advanced boy could not pass the Little Go at Cambridge—one might as well try to teach pigs trigonometry. And then, the utter insubordination and boorishness of the boys—oh! it was enough to drive him silly. He could not possibly stand another term of such degraded drudgery.

These melancholy ruminations of Mr. Raikes were

suddenly interrupted by the most fearful and unearthly din. Smash went the window into ten thousand smithereens; a fiery flying serpent rushed at him, shrieking forth fury; a frightful, hideous roaring and hissing and spouting forth of fire and suffocating smoke!

The master sprang up from his chair and stood in sheer amazement, unable to collect his faculties or in any way to realize the situation. The demon, pouring forth a hurricane of fire, struck against the ceiling and shot against the wall. It made a swoop and cannoned off the chimneypiece, 'dealing destruction's devastating doom' to the clock, china ornaments, and photographs. It came straight at the unfortunate owner, who barely had time to bob; and, as it was, he got a swinging cut from the stick, which had been broken in its mad career.

Then it was a matter of jumping and dodging to escape the attacks of the ruthless monster. The mathematical books had been hurled from the shelf in ruinous confusion, as though to shatter the fond hope that mathematical erudition would lead their owner to fame. The climax was a tremendous explosion, which filled the room with falling stars, blue, red and yellow. One caught the hapless gentleman in the face, and burnt off a considerable portion of his right whisker. The others fell anywhere and everywhere, and burnt merrily, setting fire to the carpet and tablecloth. But there was a partial lull in the fury of the flaming



tempest, and, amid the stifling smoke, the victim had presence of mind enough to make for a can of water which was ready for his bath next morning, and by pouring it copiously about the room, he at length succeeded in extinguishing the various centres of conflagration.

Coughing and choking and smarting from his wounds, Mr. Raikes flung open the other window, and made for the door, which he left open, and walked down the passage, hardly knowing what he did or whither he should go. With dazed sensations and faltering steps he made his way to Dr. Saunderson's study.

Covering with his hand the remains of his disorganized whisker, Cuthbert Raikes, Esq., B.A., timidly entered the Doctor's sanctum. Had he been less agitated in mind he would have reflected that a striped blazer and carpet slippers hardly formed the correct costume in which to appear before his chief. But he was incapable of any mental effort.

The Doctor was standing at the window, which commanded a view of the playground. He had been watching the carnival with much interest and amusement, and now the *tableau vivant* was striking and impressive—the whole school assembled round the bonfire and illuminated by the lurid blaze.

The Doctor turned, and raised his eyebrows in surprise at the figure before him.

‘What! Mr. Raikes! have you come to ask me to play a game of racquets at this time of night?’

Abashed by the remark—racquets being a game which Mr. Raikes had never played in his life, and conscious of the impropriety of his appearance—the unfortunate victim of circumstances stammered out an apology, and then explained, as best he could, the terrific and perilous adventures through which he had just passed.

The Doctor's brow darkened as he heard the particulars of this most serious breach of discipline. He immediately went and examined the scene of the incendiarism, and then had the school-bell rung as a signal for the bonfire to be extinguished, and in due time the boys assembled in chapel, and the fifth of November closed.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE WITHERING BLAST.

NEXT morning, immediately after prayers, Dr. Saunderson sent for his senior prefect, and told him what had happened.

‘I think, Armstrong, as you prefects made yourselves responsible for order, and promised to prevent any breach of discipline in the matter of fireworks last night, that it would be better for you to investigate this business. I need hardly impress upon you the dastardly and infamous character of the outrage. It has been attended with very serious results, and they might have been far worse. As it is, considerable damage has been done to property; but that is of minor importance compared with the defiance of all law and order displayed by the offence. At all costs the perpetrator of the outrage must be discovered and brought to justice. It is for you to discover him; the punishment must remain in my hands alone.’

‘Yes, sir, I think you may leave it to us to find the offender; but should there be any difficulty, I am sure we may calculate upon your support, in case it

may be necessary to stop any privilege, such as leave-out on Saturday.'

'Of course. You have my sanction to take whatever measures you think right to assist your investigation. I have complete confidence in my prefects; they must always feel that I support them to the full extent of my authority.'

'Thank you, sir. I hope we shall find the fellow without troubling you to interfere, and you may be certain that our conduct in the matter will be loyal to yourself and the traditions of the college.'

Armstrong bowed to the Doctor and withdrew. He used to say that when 'argufying' with the headmaster he was always startled by his own eloquence, and I think on this occasion he had good ground for so saying.

Armstrong felt pretty sure in his own mind that either Fairfield or Johnson was the culprit. Probably Johnson, for he hardly thought Fairfield would be guilty of such a gross outrage; but possibly they might have hatched the plot and executed it together. Everyone had heard of the thrashing they both received from the Doctor for impertinence to Mr. Raikes, and it seemed not unlikely that this was the retaliation they had thought fit to exact.

The senior prefect went on his way to the common-room, where he found some of his brethren assembled in conclave. They questioned him at once.

'Well, what did the Doctor want? Any row up?'

‘Rather; I should just think there was! Some fellow had the cheek to fire a rocket into Raikes’ room last night through the window. Did you ever hear of such audacious conduct? It’s too good a joke! I could hardly keep my countenance while the Doctor indulged his lucubrations upon the heinousness of the crime. With all due respect to those in authority, I think Master Raikes is about as big an ass as ever essayed to educate the British youth; yet that is hardly a sufficient reason why he should be sent up to heaven on the wings of a skyrocket. There’s moderation in all things; *auream mediocritatem*, you know.’

Various expressions of amazement, not to say amusement, greeted the ambassador’s intelligence, and Armstrong went on to say:

‘Probably that wretched young imp Johnson is at the bottom of it, and at the top as well, though possibly Fairfield might have had a finger in the pie. It’s all very well to laugh at the ludicrous side of the matter, but upon my honour I don’t know what they don’t deserve. Of course we shall never again be allowed to have fireworks on the fifth of November, that is very certain. Whoever did it ought to be kicked out of the place; there cannot be more than one side to that question. The Doctor says we must discover the scoundrel, and he will punish him. I only hope he will thrash him first, and expel him afterwards.’

‘Yes, it’s a howling shame,’ said another. ‘Who could be such an idiot? Johnson would hardly have the cheek. Are you sure it wasn’t a squib, or even a cracker? It couldn’t really have been a rocket!’

‘I don’t suppose there was much of it left to give evidence. Yet, likely enough, old Raikes doesn’t know the difference. The Doctor must have been sure, though.’

‘Well,’ added a third, ‘it was a project worthy of Guido himself; and if it was fated to come off, I only wish I could have been a spectator. It would have been grand to see Raikes capering about!’

They discussed the matter for awhile, and then Armstrong said he would go and talk like a father to the two fellows on whom his suspicion rested.

He found Ernest in his study, preparing the lesson for next school. Ernest stood up in presence of the prefect, who said:

‘Fairfield, had you anything to do with sending that rocket into Mr. Raikes’ room last night?’

Ernest looked him straight in the face, and said:

‘No, I had nothing whatever to do with it.’

‘Well, I am glad of that—and I suppose I must not ask you if you know who did it. But I think it fair to ask whether you had anything to do with suggesting the transaction?’

‘No; I knew nothing at all about it before it happened. I heard it go off; and saw it smash the window, and I told the fellow what I thought about it.’

I don't want to sneak, but I should say every other chap in the school would consider it a snobbish trick.'

Armstrong made no further remark, but went off in quest of Johnson. He found him loafing about the playground, examining the ashes of the bonfire and picking up stray fragments of dismembered guys and exploded fireworks. He had a rocket-stick, with which he stirred up the skeletons and dry bones of these interesting relics.

'Come here!' shouted Armstrong.

Johnson raised his pale and vacant face and came with shambling steps.

'Now, look here, young Johnson. I have got to ask you a point-blank question, and just give me a point-blank answer. Did you send that rocket into Mr. Raikes' window last night?'

'No, I'm sure I didn't. I wouldn't dare do such a thing; but I know who did. It was Fairfield.'

'How do you know?'

'I saw him do it. He asked me for one of my rockets, and I went to see what he was going to do with it, and he shot it into the window.'

'Well, you're a jolly young sneak, at any rate; and I tell you plainly I believe you are telling a thundering lie.'

'No, I promise you I am not. You ask Fairfield. He will not dare deny it.'

Armstrong strode away with his hands in his

pockets, wishing that the Inquisition had not been abolished. He would like to have known what further confessions the thumb-screw might have extorted from Johnson. He did not exactly see how to discover the culprit and prove his guilt. One or other of the pair was the person 'wanted'—possibly both were implicated in the conspiracy. Both had denied it; one had incriminated the other. Armstrong went back to Fairfield's study.

'I say, Fairfield, I have asked Johnson if he did it, and he says no; and he also adds that you were the fellow who did it.'

'Does he, the lying young scoundrel?' and Ernest turned red and white with excitement.

'Well, I don't believe Johnson for a moment; but one thing is certain: that I must find out who did it, or leave-out on Saturday will be stopped. It is obvious that it rests with you and Johnson to clear up the mystery, and the sooner you do it, the better—that's all.'

Ernest stood confronting the senior prefect, and said as calmly as he could that he had never told a lie in his life; and vowed inwardly that he would settle it with Johnson the next time he saw him. And when Armstrong had gone, Ernest went and found Johnson.

'Well, you are a young blackguard, and no mistake! What do you mean by telling Armstrong that I sent that rocket into Mr. Raikes' window?'



‘Oh, don’t get excited about nothing. It does no matter. It’s all right; you need not kick up a row about a trifle.’

‘Kick up a row about a trifle? I like that! They are going to stop leave-out on Saturday if they don’t find out—and you dared to say I did it! I’ve a mind to drag you by the collar into the prefects’ room!’

‘That’s a good idea! I dare say they would believe you. I don’t mind telling a lie now and then, I tell you; but I’ve never been fool enough to be found out. It’s no good your saying I did it. I will contradict every word you say, and they will believe me just as soon as they would believe you. I said I would pay you out, old chap, and I will too.’

Ernest was in a towering rage, and was utterly aghast at such infamous meanness. To think that such a boy had once been his friend!

Meantime Armstrong and another prefect came across the playground towards them.

‘Look here, you two, we have got to settle this point pretty promptly. Surely you are wise enough to know that, if leave-out on Saturday is stopped, you will have to run the gauntlet and be half murdered by the whole school. You are not such fools as to do that, I should hope. Fairfield, what have you got to say?’

‘Nothing more than I’ve said already. Johnson told a thundering lie when he said I did it.’

‘No, I didn’t, really. You know you asked me for the last rocket, and said you would pay out old Raikes. You know you did.’

Ernest ground his teeth with smothered fury. The prefects looked at him with a suspicion of doubt. He could not stand that, and with a sudden outburst of rage he swung round his right hand, and, catching Johnson on the side of his face, he sent him flying to the ground.

‘Here, gently,’ said Armstrong. ‘Force is no argument.’

And he picked up Johnson, who sobbed and choked and could hardly stand.

‘I couldn’t help it,’ said Ernest. ‘I was obliged to stop him telling those foul lies against me, and if he speaks another word I’ll do it again!’

‘Well,’ answered Armstrong, ‘I shall report to the Doctor that the only fellows who know anything about the rocket are you two, and he must settle it as he thinks right.’

The prefects marched off, and Armstrong at once went and reported the result of his inquiry at headquarters.

That afternoon in school Dr. Saunderson made an oration. He briefly related what had taken place, and called upon the two boys who alone seemed to be concerned in it to stand up. He then asked them individually what they had to say. Ernest, who disdained setting himself to accuse Johnson, simply

denied having had anything to do with it. Johnson declared, with brazen assurance, that Ernest asked him for the last remaining rocket, and shot it through Mr. Raikes' window.

Dr. Saunderson looked puzzled, and bent his piercing gaze first on one and then on the other, as though he would penetrate the thoughts hidden in their hearts. He could not believe that Ernest would tell an untruth. There was such an air of straightforward manliness about the boy.

The Doctor said to him :

‘Fairfield, you hear what Johnson says—have you any reply to make?’

‘I never told a lie in my life, sir. I don't mind being punished if I deserve it, but it's awful to think you should doubt my word. I declare to you, sir, before all the school, that I knew nothing about the rocket until it went off—I had nothing whatever to do with it, and I do beseech you to believe me, sir.’

Ernest spoke in an audible, unfaltering voice. It was as clear as daylight to everyone that he was speaking the truth, and a murmur of approbation rustled through the room, and then a suppressed cry of ‘Johnson ! Johnson !’ was whispered.

Johnson, who wore his usual pale, hang-dog expression, never winced, and looked about him with an insolent air. He was the very personification of meanness and deceit.

‘Well,’ said the Doctor, ‘I cannot refuse to believe

you, Fairfield; nor until this moment have I ever had reason to doubt your word, Johnson. You have been in many scrapes; but, so far as I know, want of truthfulness has never been brought as an accusation against you. Yet clearly one or other of you two is guilty of that infamous outrage now rendered doubly abominable by falsehood. I am placed in a very difficult position. I cannot expel you both'—the Doctor looked hard at the two boys as he said this. Ernest perceptibly shuddered, while Johnson remained unmoved—'because it might be an act of grave injustice to one of you. Neither can I pass the matter over, seeing that it is the grossest act of reckless audacity that ever came under my experience. If you are really innocent, Fairfield, you are reaping the consequences of being commonly in a scrape with Johnson. If you are the real culprit, Johnson, I can only say that you must be the most contemptible and unprincipled boy that ever came under my notice. It is a most distressing and difficult case to deal with. I feel absolutely at a loss how to act. For the present I must refrain from passing sentence. Grave suspicion must rest upon you both until the matter is made clear. Go to your respective work, all classes.'

The mystery was talked over by the boys, and no doubt the general opinion was that Johnson had done the deed. But he persisted in maintaining that it was Ernest. That contemptible wretch had hardened himself into the most determined obstinacy of con-

tinued lying. Ernest had such a loathing disgust for him that he would not demean himself by touching him. To the prefects Ernest said nothing, but several times to his more immediate friends, when they asked him in quiet confidence if it was really Johnson, he said:

‘Of course it was—the miserable, cowardly cad !  
Don’t mention his name.’

This admission was secretly reported to the prefects, and for some time the whole bias of public opinion was set against Johnson. Yet, inasmuch as no amount of persecution could make him abate one jot in his assertion that it was Ernest—that the only part he played was to supply the rocket, not knowing the purpose—a reactionary tide set in, and no small portion of the community again veered round, and thought that after all Ernest might, at any rate, have been equally guilty. And so the general verdict seemed to be that there was not much to choose between them. These ebbings and flowings in the tide of popular feeling were full of the most distressing anguish to Ernest. His life was rendered miserable, and his proud spirit crushed, by seeing his word thus doubted and his honour trampled in the dust.

The mystery seemed never destined to be solved. Dr. Saunderson talked repeatedly to the masters and prefects about it; the weeks of the term wore on, and he had well-nigh come to the conclusion that both the boys should leave the school at the end of term. This seemed to him the only way of settling the ques-

tion. Yet what if he should be guilty of an act of injustice? What if he should be blighting the prospects of an innocent boy for life? It was a weighty responsibility, and one which few head-masters would blame him for shuddering to incur.

Meanwhile another investigation was brought to bear upon the case. Several of the boys who had subscribed for the fireworks put their heads together, and made their calculations, and estimated that out of the £4 18s. 6d. subscribed they could account only for £2 15s. at the outside expended in fireworks. They remembered that it was Ernest who had asked for their subscriptions, and broad hints were thrown out accusing him of having appropriated the greater part of the funds. Before the matter came to the ears of the prefects, Johnson surreptitiously went to them and volunteered a statement. He said that some of the fellows were saying that they had not got the full value of their money in fireworks:

‘Please, I don’t know anything about it. Fairfield collected the money, and ordered the fireworks, and paid the bill; and he’s got it, I suppose, unless he has torn it up. The box was directed to me, but the bill was sent to him, and it was all done in his name.’

In the course of the same day a deputation of the dissatisfied subscribers also proceeded to the prefects’ common-room. They had drawn up a paper stating their estimated cost of the articles provided as com-

pared with the money subscribed; and they laid this paper before the august council of the Areopagus, and requested that it might receive due consideration. They met with a polite reception, and left with an assurance that the question should receive prefectorial attention.

Maurice Elton, who had never swerved from his confidence in Ernest during all the vicissitudes of this disagreeable business, was asked by Armstrong to get the bill, as a preliminary starting-point for the investigation. He waylaid Ernest as they came out of chapel that evening, and taking him affectionately by the arm, said:

‘Ernest, would you mind letting me have the bill of those fireworks? I don’t like referring to them, because I know you have been awfully worried about the affair, and must hate all allusion to it; but the prefects want to see it.’

‘Oh yes, certainly; I’ve got it. Of course you can see it, if you don’t mind coming to my study; or I can bring it to yours, if you like.’

‘Come along to yours.’

The two boys went into that small apartment, and sat down, one at each end of the table. And while Ernest was rummaging various papers in the drawer at his end of the table, Maurice said:

‘Ernest, I am most awfully sorry about this horrid business. I know well enough that you had nothing to do with it, but it is so disgusting that you should

have been brought under suspicion by the blackguardly conduct of that young scoundrel Johnson.'

'Well, it cannot be helped now. I was a born fool to make friends with him. It is too late to wish I had taken your advice, Maurice; but I will never have anything more to do with him if I can help it, and perhaps in time the fellows will know that I am innocent. If it wasn't for you, Maurice, I should run away.'

The tears glistened in Ernest's eyes as he said this. And then he put his hand in his waistcoat-pocket and took out the disc of pine-bark.

'Do you remember this? It is an awful comfort to me, Maurice; you promised to stick to me through thick and thin, and always be my friend.'

Maurice stood up and looked Ernest steadily in the face, and grasping his hand with a pressure of the warmest sincerity, said :

'I am sure it will all come right in time, Ernest. The holidays will soon be here, and next term the fellows will have forgotten all about it, and you will make a fresh start.'

'Oh, I don't know. I suppose they will always look on me with suspicion, but I must learn to put up with it somehow.'

Ernest had taken the envelope out of the drawer, and saw that it was sealed and addressed to him. He had not looked at it before.

'That's the bill—at least, I suppose it is. Johnson



gave me the envelope and said it was. Oh, Maurice, how can I ever get out of this horrible suspicion? How can I go on any longer, feeling that the Doctor doubts me, Armstrong doubts me, and half the fellows, at least, believe I did it; and most of the other half think I have told lies and am as much to blame as Johnson? You don't know what misery it is to feel like a convicted felon. I can't go into the class-room without hearing some remarks. I can't appear anywhere without being sneered at. No one likes to be seen with me. It's all very well to say I need not mind if I am innocent, but it is simply unbearable.'

And Ernest bent over the table and buried his head in his hands, and for the first time in his life, since he left the nursery, he cried and sobbed in the agony of his distress.

Then he jumped up, and dashed away the tears with the sleeves of his jacket, disgusted at his own weakness.

'Fancy my blubbering like a baby! but I can't stand it. And Armstrong told me the other day that the Doctor said I must not play in the match against Hayward's Academy unless my innocence was proved! Oh, Maurice, the disgrace is so horrible! How can I possibly endure it?'

'I am frightfully sorry for you, Ernest. All I can do is to stick to you, and stick up for you, through thick and thin. But you must not brood over it and bother yourself so much about it. I suppose this is

the first time in your life that things ever went wrong. Now's the time for philosophical meditation on the fickleness of fortune. I am not laughing. *Æquamemento rebus in arduis Servare mentem*. Cheer up, old chap. I am more sorry for you than I can say. But it will all come right. Truth is strong, and will prevail. Have you heard from home lately, Ernest ?

‘ Yes, I had a letter from mother this morning. I have not said a word to her about this bothering business ; it would only worry her, and do no good. She seems anxious about father ; he had a sort of fainting fit the other day ; but she says he is all right again, so I hope there is not anything wrong. She sent for Paddy O’Grady. What a joke he was over tennis ! You can see the letter if you like. There are lots of kind messages to you.’

‘ Thanks, I should like to read it awfully. I hope there’s not much the matter with the gallant Colonel. But, I say, it’s late. I shall never have done my work for to-morrow. Good-night, Ernest, and cheer up. Did you notice that verse in the lesson this evening, “ If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small ” ?’

‘ Yes, I did notice it, and I will try and remember it. Good-night, Maurice.’

## CHAPTER IX.

### MERCY VERSUS JUSTICE.

‘WELL, that is a queer document!’ said one of the prefects, as the bill was opened and displayed to view before the assembled council of the Areopagus in the common-room.

‘What a muddle they seem to have made of it!’

‘It’s made out in Fairfield’s name,’ said another.

‘And it is added up wrong,’ said a third.

‘Any fool can see that the prices have been altered,’ said a fourth.

It was obvious at a glance that the document had been seriously tampered with; all the insertions were altered, and the prices were evidently at least doubled, and probably in some cases trebled.

‘Well, that is a strange way of doing business!’ said Armstrong. ‘There is nothing for it but to take this bill to the Doctor, and the sooner somebody is kicked out of the place the better. Lying and forgery are hard pills to swallow.’

Maurice was dismayed at the disclosure. Things certainly looked as black as they could against Ernest. Was it possible that after all he was implicated in the

whole scrape? Just the faintest shadow of doubt flitted for a moment over Maurice's mind, to be indignantly banished on the instant. His soul revolted against the insinuation.

'Fairfield had nothing to do with that bill; it is just another of Johnson's scoundrelly proceedings.'

'Well, I hope he had not, but the circumstantial evidence seems pretty strong. Anyhow, I suppose I must take the bill to the Doctor. Eh, you fellows, what do you think?'

There was a general expression of assent, to which, of course, Maurice could not demur.

'The subscribers all say that Fairfield dunned them for the money,' said Lucas.

'Of course,' said Maurice, 'Johnson saw to that; he is deep enough to shift all responsibility. I should hope you could see that. I know Fairfield well enough, and I would stake my life that he is as innocent as any of us in the matter.'

'Well, all right; you had better tell the Doctor what you think, for I expect it will go hard with your friend after this.'

Dr. Saunderson gave the most careful attention to Armstrong's statements, and pondered long upon the new disclosures. The result was that he arrived at the conclusion that both the boys should leave the college at the end of the term. The matter seemed to increase in ugliness, putting forth fresh feelers like some foul polypus to consume the discipline and

morality of the school. Even at the risk of possible injustice he felt it his duty to cut off such a blighting contagion.

That evening he sent for Armstrong during preparation, and told him his resolve.

‘You may inform your brother prefects, but they must be bound over to keep it a secret among themselves, in case anything may arise to clear up the mystery. If any of them have anything they might like to say to me upon the subject I shall be glad to hear it.’

Armstrong withdrew, and the Doctor’s verdict was duly reported. One of the other prefects had something to say to him on the subject. That same evening, after chapel, Maurice Elton went to the Doctor’s study, and in a deferential manner asked the favour of speaking to him.

‘Sir, may I say a few words to you about the matter which has lately caused so much excitement in the school?’

‘Certainly, my boy; say exactly what you think.’

‘Well, sir, I am perfectly convinced that Fairfield is innocent on all the charges which look so black against him. I spent a fortnight of last holidays at his home, and I have known him for nine years; I was at the last school with him. His mother is one of the best and kindest ladies in the world, and she is so fond of Ernest. She knows his character well enough, and is fully aware of his weak points, but

she told me often that he is the very soul of honour and truth. Oh, sir, I do implore you to take this statement into consideration. It would simply break her heart if Ernest were expelled. All her hopes are centred upon him. And I am absolutely certain that he is innocent. Johnson has been telling one lie after another to shift the blame on to Fairfield. It was Johnson who ordered the fireworks and paid the bill, and had it made out in Fairfield's name. It was Johnson who altered the bill and then sealed up the envelope; tradesmen do not seal up their bills. Ernest handed it to me just as he received it, and he assured me he had never seen the bill at all. I know you would shrink from an act of terrible injustice, sir, and I will answer for it that if you expel Fairfield it will be terribly unjust.'

Dr. Saunderson sat silent for some moments, and then said :

'I thank you, Elton, for your plain speaking, and I would like to believe all you say as far as it concerns Fairfield. Far be it from me to act hastily in such a matter. I will weigh every word of what you have told me. It is Fairfield's first term. I regret exceedingly that he has not kept clear of such grave suspicion. I have already punished him for his behaviour towards Mr. Raikes; he has more than once been reported for thoughtless and foolish breaches of discipline. He has not impressed me in his general conduct as favourably as I could have wished. But

all that is trivial in comparison with this most serious suspicion. Johnson, on the other hand, has been here several terms. He appears to me to be a weak-minded fellow, but there is nothing against him in my penal books which casts a slur upon his truthfulness. Clearly, one or other of the two boys is guilty of the grossest misconduct, rendered more infamous by lying and deceit. Such a stain upon our honour cannot be wiped out by any ordinary punishment. It seems impossible to decide between the two boys. And the interests of the school are of paramount importance. Justice towards the community demands vindication for a very grievous course of systematic offence. How can I possibly pass it over? If I excuse Ernest, I must excuse Johnson; I cannot hold the latter entirely and solely guilty upon such slender evidence. He has positively asserted his own innocence and the other's guilt. Either I must extend free pardon, and pass the matter over entirely, and allow both the boys to remain, or I must remove them both. I see no middle course. And to my mind there is no doubt which course ought to be adopted. In the interests of our good name, and discipline, and example, both the boys ought unquestionably to go. It will not be public expulsion. I shall merely write to their parents and state the grounds of my action, and they will certainly see that I had no other alternative.'

Then Maurice answered:

‘Well, sir, if you will pardon my presumption in venturing to argue with you, I would say that in so doing you will simply blight the chances of one of the boys for life, without any just cause. Fairfield is as innocent as I am, or as Armstrong, or any of the prefects. I would sooner believe that I had done it myself than that he did it. For the sake of justice, and to prevent unspeakable sorrow being brought upon a happy home without a shadow of real cause, I do beseech you, sir, to reconsider your judgment.’

‘I will think over what you have said, Elton, and your words shall have all possible weight. I will again discuss the matter with the masters. I thank you for your manly, straightforward counsel. Now I must be alone.’

Maurice bowed to the Doctor, and left the room.

To make a long and tedious matter as short as possible, it may be stated that nothing more was authoritatively said about the question until the last week of term.

One afternoon, when the examination-papers had been shown up, before the boys left the big school-room, Dr. Saunderson harangued them on the subject. He said that he had given it the deepest attention, and considered it in all its bearings, and had finally decided to allow both Fairfield and Johnson to return to the college next term. He felt deeply that in extending mercy he might be transgressing justice. ‘But,’ he added, ‘the very foundation of our hopes for this life



and the next is, that the Great Father of us all may temper Divine justice with mercy towards each one of us. And so, while the voice of our fair name calls loudly to banish from our midst those who, whether directly or indirectly, have brought discredit upon us, yet, in fear of acting unjustly towards one of them, I have decided to turn a deaf ear towards that voice. And I would most solemnly impress upon the two boys that their future conduct should bear witness to the wisdom of my decision, by the resolute determination never again to incur such a charge. I cannot shut my eyes against the fact that it is due to most glaring and systematic falsehoods that one or other of these boys is allowed to remain at the college; and while my soul revolts against the degrading nature of such an admission, yet my hands are tied by uncertainty, and I cannot act otherwise. To all the boys whose sense of honour and truth is noble I appeal for sympathy and forbearance. I am placed in a dilemma which occasions to us all the most profound humiliation, but my final verdict has been given. Fairfield and Johnson, you will have an opportunity of regaining our confidence, which has been rudely shaken; and may this solemn warning make due impression upon you both!

Dr. Saunderson sat down and covered his face with both his hands. He was evidently much agitated, and I am sure most of us felt that he had done the only thing he could do under the circumstances. Fairfield had stood in his place during the Doctor's speech, pale, but

looking straight at the speaker. Johnson, too, had stood with his eyes turned in the same direction. Maurice Elton was the only member of St. Andrew's who really knew Ernest Fairfield, and probably he alone at that moment was absolutely confident of Ernest's innocence. He was faithful to his friend, and was not afraid to show it. And as we filed out of the school-room that evening, and the audibly whispered comments gradually swelled into loud talk as the boys neared the door, Maurice went up to Fairfield and took his arm, and walked with him to his study.

There was an attempt to get up a sort of demonstration, but it was somewhat feeble. A few voices called out, 'Hurrah for Fairfield!' but there was not much response. And when someone volunteered the same for Johnson there was unmistakable hissing mingled with mild hurrahs. No one hissed Fairfield, though few applauded him. The fact was, we were heartily sick of the whole affair. It had had its day, and, like a threadbare garment, we thought it high time that it should be laid aside.

There remained about ten days of the term. Two of the three important football matches were over. Ernest had not played in either of them, his place being supplied by Norman, an old hand among the burly members of the Shell. Ernest had watched these matches with the keenest interest, and made himself hoarse with cheering. He was comforted after the second game, which St. Andrew's lost, by Armstrong

saying to his side that he wished he could have had Fairfield—it would have made a lot of difference. Not very complimentary to the substitute, but pleasant to the ears of Ernest. The third match still remained, and now that the burning question of the past weeks was for the time assuaged, Dr. Saunderson signified to Armstrong his wish that Ernest should be restored to his place in the Fifteen, and play in the last match. The captain felt some scruples in asking him, but Ernest was not the sort of fellow to show any false pride, and was delighted to play. And he played in grand form, making two splendid runs in the course of the game, finishing up the second by dropping a goal thirty yards from the posts. The game was against the town club, and St. Andrew's won by three goals to two. Armstrong was right when he said Ernest made all the difference.

His prowess in that football match went a long way towards uplifting him in the estimation of the school and restoring him to the popularity which he had lost. But still a certain section eyed him askance, and gathered up their skirts in his presence to avoid contamination—even as the men of Belial behaved towards King Saul on his exaltation.

The sense of relief produced in Ernest's mind by the Doctor's verdict was grateful, and now that he was able to think of something else besides the all-absorbing sense of humiliation, his thoughts naturally turned towards home and the happy prospect of holidays.

His mother's letter had made him anxious about his father, and he wrote to Dr. O'Grady to ask fuller particulars. He received the following answer :

‘DEAR BEAUCHAMP,

‘In reply to your letter, I must tell you that the gallant Colonel is not so young as he was thirty years ago. The wheels of life will not run so easily at seventy-five as they did at forty-five. What says your friend Cicero about the fruit, when it is mellow, dropping off at a slight touch? Ah, my boy, your dear father has always had a stout heart, and it has borne him bravely beyond the span of threescore years and ten; and now that heart whispers in my ear that it is getting weary of its long service. I cannot bear to make you anxious, my dear boy—nor that sweet lady, your esteemed mother; but your father needs care. He must not be unnecessarily excited; he must avoid all exertion, and as far as possible enjoy the calm repose that should close the evening of life's long day. And should he be summoned to headquarters without much notice, it will be well with him. Who can doubt it? *Vita brevis!* I hope I have not spoken too bluntly. My best esteem will always be towards you. Farewell, Fairfield! Adieu, Beauchamp! *Vale, Pulcher Ager!*

‘From your sincere friend,

‘PADDY O'G.’

## CHAPTER X.

### CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS.

DURING the first few days at home Ernest had ample opportunity for thinking over the events of the past term. His review was certainly not very encouraging. He felt crushed by the memory of the terrible suspicion cast upon him. A dark cloud, with no prospect of a break, seemed to rest on the horizon in front and behind. He was angry with himself for having allowed his intimacy with Johnson to spring up against Maurice's advice. He blamed himself bitterly for letting that intimacy get him into foolish scrapes. But every other consideration was dwarfed by the remembrance of that barefaced lying which caused his own word to be doubted, and brought him into such terrible disgrace. He was dreading the arrival of his report. What would Dr. Saunderson say about him? How miserable it would make his father and mother!

Mrs. Fairfield noticed the careworn expression on Ernest's face. His happy laugh had not once been heard, though he had been home three days. He seemed listless, and showed little interest in anything.

His mother was greatly distressed, and asked him the reason.

‘Well, mother, I did not get on very well last term, and, to finish up, one of the fellows told a lot of lies about me, and tried to make out that I had told them, and the Doctor half believed him. I know I shall have a bad report, and that will make you and father unhappy. It was awful to have those lies told about me!’

Mrs. Fairfield entered fully into Ernest’s troubles. With a mother’s sympathy and tact, she drew from him a minute history of all the particulars. She laughed over the adventure with the rocket. Ernest opened his eyes wide with astonishment at the idea of anyone seeing a corner by which a laugh could creep in. But she cried the next moment on hearing how Johnson had declared that Ernest shot the rocket through the window.

‘Never mind, dear,’ said Mrs. Fairfield; ‘you must not brood over it. I am sure Maurice never doubted you.’

‘No, mother, he was awfully good about it. He stuck to me through thick and thin. But, then, lots of the fellows think I told a lie, and the masters don’t believe me; and altogether it is such a horrid state of things, that I wish you would not let me go back. I shall never be able to live it down.’

‘Shall we ask Maurice to come and stay here a few days?’

‘No, mother, I don’t think you had better; it could do no good. I want to forget all about St. Andrew’s for a little while, if possible; and Maurice would only rake it all up again.’

Christmas Day passed, with its message of peace and goodwill. To Ernest it seemed a bitter irony to speak of goodwill, while a vision of Johnson haunted his mind sleeping and waking; nor would the prospect of his report admit of his enjoying peace. Two days afterwards, among the letters handed to the Colonel at the breakfast-table was a long blue envelope, on which Ernest had little difficulty in recognising Dr. Saunderson’s handwriting.

In the course of the morning Colonel Fairfield called Ernest into his study, to hold what Ernest afterwards described as a ‘court-martial.’

‘Your report came this morning, Ernest, and I should like to have a little talk with you about it.’

The Colonel sat back in his arm-chair, crossing his legs and adjusting his spectacles, and then he unfolded the report.

‘Dr. Saunderson does not appear satisfied with you, Ernest. He says: “In all his work there seems to be a want of resolute endeavour. He is apt to be troublesome to the masters, and there has been much in his general conduct that was unsatisfactory.” That is not very flattering, Ernest. I am disappointed. Then, besides this, Dr. Saunderson has written me a letter, which I had better read to you. He says: “I

feel bound to add that your son was implicated in a matter which caused me serious distress—to what extent he may have been concerned I cannot say. I would not say that I doubt his word, but one of his friends accused him of committing a very grave offence, and other charges of suspicion in connection with it were brought against him. He will explain the circumstances to which I allude, and I feel sure you will give him the best counsel upon the subject.”

Colonel Fairfield put down the letter and took off his spectacles.

‘Your mother has told me all about the matter to which the Doctor alludes. I know you well enough to be perfectly sure that you did not tell an untruth, Ernest. But I would not for a moment say that you are proof against getting into scrapes. I know what boys are—and when they get together it may happen that one will lead another on to do foolish things—possibly unprincipled things. But, my dear boy, I know that if in a thoughtless mood you were led to do anything of which you were afterwards ashamed, you would never demean yourself to tell an untruth about it. Am I not right in so saying?’

‘Yes, father, you are right. I never consciously told a lie, and having to bear the suspicion of it is too much. I cannot stand it. Don’t let me go back to St. Andrew’s!’

Ernest’s voice faltered, and he dashed the tears from his eyes, as he went on to say:



‘That boy Johnson told lie upon lie against me. There was no one near when he shot the rocket into Mr. Raikes’ window. I had nothing to do with it. He asked me to come with him, but I had no notion what he was going to do till I heard the whizzing of the rocket and saw it smash into the window. Then afterwards he declared I did it, and there was no proof that I didn’t; and then he bagged the money, and put that on me as well: there never was such a horrible lot of lies told against a fellow before, and I could do nothing but say I hadn’t done any of it.’

‘I am perfectly satisfied on the main point, Ernest. I am convinced, my dear boy, that you told the plain truth, and I am indignant that groundless suspicion should be laid upon you. But that need not distress you much. A clear conscience is like polished silver—the breath of deceit blown upon it only leaves a momentary dimness, which soon disappears, because the purity of the metal cannot retain it. Therefore neither you nor I need attach any grave importance to that part of the indictment. But, look you, Ernest, if you touch pitch you soil your fingers; if you cast in your lot with unprincipled boys and get into trouble through their means, you cannot expect to escape the bitter consequences.’

‘I know that is all true, father. I have learnt by experience that I was a fool to have anything to do with Johnson. Maurice warned me, but I did not know what sort of a fellow he was. I was sorry for

him because he was generally disliked and scouted. I was sorry for him because he was such a miserable, puny-looking wretch, and I don't suppose his parents care twopence about him.'

'I fully believe your motives were generous if not wise, Ernest; but there is a screw loose somewhere which wants tightening. Possibly a little less self-reliance, and a little more deference to the shrewd advice of your good friend Maurice, might have saved you all the trouble. We all learn by experience, but it is often a stern teacher. I hope this lesson will not be lost upon you. Remember that a man is known by his friends. But with regard to the unsatisfactory nature of your work, and giving trouble to the masters, I am very sorry Dr. Saunderson should have cause to say such things—it cannot be all Johnson.'

'It was mostly, though, father—at least, it was because I was fool enough to sit by him in school. I know I have been foolish, father; but it's give a dog a bad name and hang him. The Doctor was set against me by that heartless liar, and then he mentions things he would otherwise have passed over——'

'Oh, come, Ernest, that is hardly meeting the enemy in fair combat!'

'I don't want to make excuses for everything, but Johnson was at the root of all my trouble, and it well-nigh breaks my heart to think how ungrateful and disreputable you and mother must think me!'

Ernest rubbed his sleeve hard across his eyes.

‘ Well, my boy, put your shoulder to the wheel. I have every confidence in your good intentions, but they will not do by themselves. Candidly, I think one failing in your character is a want of stern resolution. You want some of Napoleon’s spirit. You want to go straight up the hill against the enemy like the Black Watch in the battle of the Alma.’

The Colonel took up a volume of Kinglake’s ‘ Crimea,’ and found the place and read : ‘ In the land where those men were bred there are shadows of clouds moving up the mountain-side, and their path is rugged and steep, but their course is smooth and easy. Smoothly and easily the long line moved up the hill, and the dense ranks of the enemy fell back.’

The Colonel said a great deal more to Ernest, reasoning with him on the ground of strong, high principle, and they were closeted together in the study nearly two hours. What he chiefly insisted upon was that, looked at from any point of view, Dr. Saunderson’s report pointed to the fact that Ernest had made a bad start. There might be injustice arrayed against him—there evidently was the venom of malice and deceit—there might be manifold excuses, but the main result of his first term at St. Andrew’s was disappointment and a sense of failure ; and if such a beginning was to be a criterion of the future, the prospect was not encouraging.

Colonel Fairfield argued upon the highest ground of strong principle, founded on the fear of God,

honour to parents, and duty, and his words were forcible and straight to the point. They impressed Ernest with the consciousness that it was not *all* Johnson; that he had reaped the fruits of his own folly in making an intimate friend of such a boy. Nevertheless, though admitting that, and accusing himself with all bitterness, the dark shadow of the cloud still hovered over him, and his proud spirit chafed against being made the victim of meanness and deceit.

But now the worst was over. The report had come; his father and mother knew of his troubles; they had talked over the various incidents, and he had promised them to put on a bold face against all that worried and vexed his peace of mind. The Colonel had rebuked his idleness and want of stern resolution, but he had smiled on him again, and said in his jolly way :

‘Cheer up, Ernest, my lad; don’t be down in the mouth. You have been badly treated, and I have written to Dr. Saunderson, telling him what I think of his pupil Johnson, and hinting as broadly as possible that if he keeps such a young scoundrel in his school he cannot be surprised if parents remove their sons from his influence; which I, for one, shall certainly do if Johnson does you any further injury. Such a young scapegrace would be kicked out of a regiment in no time, and it doesn’t say much for the tone of St. Andrew’s if such specimens are to be found

in it. I have given the Doctor some of my mind on the subject, Ernest, and I hope he will act upon it.'

His father's conciliation was the greatest comfort to Ernest, and his mother's sympathy was so constant and deep, that their combined influence soon restored his spirits to their accustomed cheerfulness. And now that the shadow of the cloud seemed clearing away, Ernest was eager to ask Maurice down to Combe Grange. Mrs. Fairfield and the Colonel were delighted, and Maurice, who had been hoping for an invitation, wrote by return of post, accepting it with the utmost alacrity.

The first of January dawned bright and frosty, and Ernest interpreted it as the harbinger of a glad new year. Maurice was to reach Bridport by the afternoon train, and, as before, Ernest drove over to meet him, and brought him to the Grange in high glee. While they were driving from the station, the Colonel went down to the lower regions of the cellar, attended by old John. They came back, each carrying a bottle, which might have been nothing but a heap of mouldering cobwebs, so far as outward appearance went, or might have been a precious relic exhumed from some ancient sarcophagus, and frail enough to fall to pieces under the influence of fresh air, so carefully did the master and servant carry their treasure.

'Take care how you go upstairs, John; don't shake it for the world; don't move it out of that position.

Take care! That's it. Now, how can we decant them? Let me see.'

They had reached the pantry, after one of the most solemn journeys old John had ever made.

'Wuss than going to a funeral!' as he afterwards reported in the kitchen.

The bottles were placed side by side on the table, while the Colonel considered how to decant them. A happy thought struck him.

'Ah, I've got it! 'Tention! Get that trestle which you use for sawing up the wood.'

John went and fetched it. The Colonel took off his coat, and rolled up his sleeves, and loaded his corkscrew.

'Now, then, sit astride of the trestle and hold the bottle in position with both hands, and for dear life do not let it move!'

Old John knit his brows and set his jaws hard, and held tight to the bottle, aimed as if he were going to shoot the Colonel somewhere about the third button of the waistcoat. Meanwhile the gallant old officer screwed with the utmost caution, and pulled a steady pull, and without any catastrophe both the bottles were decanted.

The warm reception which awaited Maurice at Combe Grange was a pleasant contrast to the cold journey he had had. They sat down to dinner that evening a snug party of four. The stately silver candlesticks and epergne, which the officers of the

regiment had presented to the Colonel on his retirement, had been brought out for the occasion, and the precious wines stood in their crystal decanters in front of the Colonel.

‘We had a rare job, boys, John and I, to decant this wine; had to be done gingerly, I can tell you! Mary, my love, you must taste the sherry. It is some your dear father gave me on our wedding-day. He came down to the Grange soon after and brought it with him, and unpacked the hamper himself, and took out each bottle and put it in its place; and never a hand touched the bottle after his till I took it from its place this afternoon.’

Old John carried round the decanter with due solemnity and filled Mrs. Fairfield’s glass. Then the Colonel directed him to do the same for Maurice and Ernest.

‘Have a glass of sherry, boys, and you shall taste the port at dessert. Doesn’t do to encourage young men to take wine. Never tasted a drop till I was eighteen. But on this auspicious occasion——’

The Colonel cleared his throat, but checked himself. He intended to make a little speech by-and-by, and was on the brink of anticipating matters.

Then the plates were cleared, and the cloth removed in good old-fashioned style, and old John screwed up his eyes with a glance of honest pride, as he viewed the polished mahogany shining with

brilliant surface, for he had spent a good half-hour over it that morning.

The dessert was set in array, and Mrs. Fairfield was prevailed upon to let Maurice half fill her glass with the famous vintage of '45; and when all glasses were duly charged the Colonel again cleared his throat, and said:

'Mary, my love, I should like to say a few words upon this occasion. My dear old father liked to get his family round him on the first night of a new year. He gave us a rattling good dinner, and then when our hearts were warmed with good cheer, he set them aglow with good words. Now I thank God for all His goodness to us during the past year. I thank Him for blessing me with such a wife and son, and for sending us such a good young friend as Maurice Elton. May God's blessing rest upon us through this coming year! May He order every event of it for our temporal and eternal good! Attention! Let us join in singing that dear old New Year's toast:

'Here's a health to all those that we love!  
Here's a health to all those that love us!  
Here's a health to all those that love them that love those  
That love those that love them that love us!'

Three out of the four, being accomplished musicians, sang their parts with graceful expression. Ernest chimed in with a good round voice, which he did not exactly know how to manage, and sang no part in particular, but sang it heartily—it did not much



matter. Then the Colonel bowed to his wife, and drank the generous wine, and then they all drank to one another, and Mrs. Fairfield, with melting eyes, said :

‘Ernest, you must return thanks for us to your father.’

And Ernest blushed and cleared his throat, and said :

‘It’s rather alarming! My dear father, we thank you for your good words. I am no hand at public speaking, but opposite me sits one of the brightest stars of his College Debating Club, and I must get him to treat us to a flourish of rhetoric. I hope I shall be able to please you and mother more this year than I did last. I promise you I will do my best, and I hope all your good words will come true. Now, Maurice, show me how I ought to have done it.’

Maurice made some remarks with humour and without conceit, and the glasses rattled when he sat down.

The days passed only too quickly. Maurice had been greatly relieved to find Ernest in such good spirits, not minding to talk over the troubles of last term, and taking a hopeful view of the future prospect. The Colonel and Mrs. Fairfield discussed the whole question with Maurice, and it was the greatest comfort to them to see how enthusiastically he supported Ernest—how certain he was that all Ernest said was absolutely true. Ernest was a splendid

fellow, one of the finest runners at football that the college had ever known : the captain said so. It was not his fault if he hated lessons, and, after all, he did them infinitely better than lots of fellows. Many such conversations comforted the parents immensely.

There was no lack of employment and amusement for the boys at Combe Grange. For one of them music in the evenings was an endless resource. There was the billiard-table for wet days—only the days were not wet. It was a bright, open winter ; and down in that fair southern land the days grew longer so perceptibly—you could see the time by your watch after five o'clock—and the buds on the trees looked beginning to swell, and occasional thrushes lifted up their voices in song. The hazel-groves were hung with ‘lambs’-tails,’ and when the sun shone through them they were tassels of shimmery chenille. The two boys were out of doors almost all day long, sometimes starting directly after breakfast, and breaking cover across country, over the hills and far away to the sea, going straight as the crow flies ; and then along the shore, while Maurice spouted Homer at intervals, and even Ernest found himself doing the same. ‘Is Saul also among the prophets?’ asked Maurice. To be sure, Ernest’s quotation was limited to that one line ending with *poluphloisboio thalassēs*, but by reason of his manner of utterance it did duty for a great deal. The great waves came surging onwards, tossing their fringed crests with a sprinkle of

dancing spray. Gathering gigantic volume, and poised for one brief moment in equilibrium, they curved over in fluted columns of burnished bronze, and plunged their mighty tons of water full upon the beach, rebounding in ragged fragments of writhing waters, foamy fountains, and clouds of seething spray. Oh, the *athesphaton deima*, the unspeakable wonder of the boisterous sea! Who can walk beside it unmoved, 'when, with a wild commotion, when, with a rush and roar, the whole enormous ocean is flung upon the shore'? when the breaking waves, like huge sea-monsters, dig their myriad lion-claws deep into the solid earth, the white blood bursting and spouting in showery cataracts of foam?

'PoluPHLOISBOIO thalassEEEEES!' shouted Ernest, with all the power his lungs could command, as some huge *trikumia*, some third wave, supposed by the Greeks to surpass the intervening two in magnitude, came down with a tremendous flump, and sent its streams of sea-champagne full thirty yards up the beach, to rush back swirling and curdling over the shingle with a hissing crescendo of the shrillest 'seeEEEEEEes.'

## CHAPTER XI.

### ULYSSES OF MANY WILES.

ERNEST went back to St. Andrew's with good resolutions, strengthened by the affectionate counsels of his parents and the sober schoolboy philosophy of Maurice. He was determined to take a hopeful view of things, and pay no regard to any insinuations about the past; to go at his lessons like a puppy worrying some convenient article of furniture within reach; to show proper respect to all his masters, and, above everything, to keep clear of any dealings with Johnson.

The prospect gradually unfolded itself with more pleasure and less discomfort than he had ventured to expect. His old friends, the burly members of the Shell, were as jolly as sand-boys towards him. Others, who since the 'excitement' had either treated him with cold disdain or steered past him with sneering superiority, now shifted the helm a point or two, and showed more friendly inclinations. Even Johnson's friends ceased from openly offensive behaviour. There seemed a general disposition to acknowledge that he had not been fairly treated, and that he was really

a thorough good fellow at heart, which verdict was true. His work was now far more satisfactory, and all the masters spoke well of him. Ernest was now putting his shoulder to the wheel, and exerting himself manfully to do his work. He had found himself on return to St. Andrew's bottom but one of the old Shell, with seven fresh additions, either new boys or boys promoted. Johnson was next above him. But after four weeks' work, in which Ernest mounted upwards by leaps and bounds, he was top of the class. This gave him the keenest satisfaction, and Maurice's congratulations were delightful, and they both wrote such letters to Combe Grange that Colonel and Mrs. Fairfield were made thoroughly happy. And to crown it all, after Ernest had again come out top with flying colours in the fifth week's marks, Dr. Saunderson called him up and congratulated him, and said he was now doing his duty nobly, and as an unusual mark of approbation he would promote him into the Lower Fifth at the end of the sixth week.

'Oh, sir, I don't know how to thank you! It will make them so happy at home!'

'Well, my boy, it is for me to thank you for really exerting yourself to work. I was willing to make every allowance for you last term in this respect; the first term is generally more or less of a trial term for a boy. But I tell you candidly that last term you did not work as you ought, and this term you have done so, and the difference in the results must be a

clear proof to you that my judgment on that score at any rate was correct.'

Ernest could not question the truth of these remarks, though the corollary suggested at the end grated on his soul. However, his eyes had been opened by the brilliant results of his work, and he felt that it was quite another thing to what it had been.

During these five weeks Ernest had stuck rigidly to his determination to have nothing to do with Johnson. He had not once spoken to him, though there had often been provocation. At first Johnson kept in the background, and seemed disposed to be quiet and unobtrusive. His offensive swagger had been pleasantly noticeable by its absence, and he had not even given Mr. Raikes any cause for serious complaint. But this state of things only lasted a fortnight or so. As time went on the old spirit seemed to revive in this most unlovely boy. He was less attentive at lessons, and more disposed to be troublesome. He got some of the new boys into scrapes and received a castigation from the 'Pag' (as the pre-fectorial tribunal was concisely called). And then, resenting Ernest's persistent refusal to speak, Johnson had latterly tried by various methods to provoke him to say something. But Ernest, though often sore tempted to let out upon him both with hand and tongue, restrained the inclination, and Johnson's evil heart meditated bitter imaginations against him. Johnson had not forgotten how Ernest felled him to

the ground that day last term; he had not forgotten Ernest's sneering contempt at his play in that football match; he was filled with malicious envy against Ernest's popularity and success this term, and now the engrossing thought in Johnson's heart was nothing else than to compass the ruin of Ernest's happiness.

There had been a rage in the school that term for scientific toys. Some boy had brought back a beautiful model engine and train, with lines of rails that would reach from one end of the schoolroom to the other. It was fine sport to the smaller boys to set this engine off, and see it puff on its way right gallantly. Even some of the seniors could not resist the attraction, and two prefects were seen to stop one day and watch the progress of the toy-train. Then, fired by emulation, other boys invested in small locomotives and lines of rails. The 'plant' increased rapidly, until there were no less than three rival companies with three distinct lines scientifically laid in the schoolroom. Then followed engine-races, and then trains were started at half-speed, followed by others at full-speed, whereby accidents and runnings-in were represented with all the pomp and pageant of reality.

But the crowning diversion was reserved for a scheme which exactly suited the reckless audacity of boys. Two happy possessors of engines—Ramsden and Sturgess—had an unhappy dispute about their

respective merits in speed and strength. There were numerous partisans for each. The engines were started side by side on parallel lines at the same moment, and by the verdict of appointed judges they passed the winning-post simultaneously. They were found to weigh the same, and in every imaginable respect seemed of equal merit. But as neither owner would rest content with equality, it was resolved to test the question by the only method which promised to be decisive.

The most skilful engineers among the boys were employed to make a line of rails perfectly level. Plates were taken up and relaid by the spirit-level. So keen was the interest shown in the forthcoming contest that a fellow in the Upper Fifth, regardless of the fact that he had on his best trousers, at the request of an engineer would lie down at full length on the dirty floor; and, laying his head in the dust, with cocked eye would survey the line and pronounce his opinion as contentedly as if a young lady had asked him to sit by her side at a garden-party and eat strawberries and cream.

The contest was duly advertised, and when the appointed time came every member of the college was assembled in the schoolroom, and the babel of tongues rivalled the proverbial clamour of the Stock Exchange.

The conditions of the contest had been drawn up by a committee, each competitor choosing three repre-



sentatives. The antagonists were to toss for ends. Each engine was to be started behind a chalk-mark drawn at either end of the course. The space between these marks had been divided in half by the most accurate measurement, and at that point a line of white thread was passed under the plates, chalk being not deemed delicate enough. Whichever engine first reached this central line was to be pronounced the conqueror, provided that both were so damaged by the collision as to be incapable of further locomotion. If, however, the one which reached the line first should be incapacitated by the subsequent shock, while the other should be able to continue its journey when set upright, this latter engine should be pronounced the conqueror.

These conditions were now read out as soon as comparative silence had been obtained. The owners tossed for choice of ends. Ramsden won, and, being a youth of fashion, chose the west end. Steam was commanded to be got up; boilers were filled; spirit-lamps charged and lighted. Then a quiet interval passed, and heads were strained from one end to the other watching for the first symptoms of steam. Then came the supreme moment. Each engine was evidently impatient of delay. The starter asked if Ramsden and Sturgess were ready. They answered:

‘Yes.’

He then asked if the two judges and referees were ready at the central line.

‘Yes.’

Then if each umpire at the starting-points was ready.

‘Yes.’

‘Then, Ramsden and Sturgess, place your engines on the rails in exact position. If either of you, by the verdict of his umpire, in the slightest degree propels his engine forward at the word “Go,” his umpire shall disqualify him. I shall say, “Are you ready? Go!” Ramsden’s umpire, is all straight at your end?’

‘Yes.’

‘Sturgess’s umpire, is all straight at your end?’

‘Yes.’

‘ARE YOU READY? Go!’

The two gallant little ‘puff-puffs’ (as the dear little two-year-olds call them) set out upon their momentous journey, heedless of the awful agony in prospect. The excitement was tremendous. The course was 105 feet long. Shouts of ‘Ramsden!’ ‘Sturgess!’ were simply deafening. Forward they went on their deadly way, gathering velocity and momentum at every stroke of the pistons, and, amid a breathless lull, the crisis of the crisis arrived. There was a smart report of clashing metal, a pause of one-fiftieth of a second, a fizzing hiss of rushing wheels, a kick-up and a smash. The Ramsden was thrown off the rails, and appeared damaged beyond reclaim — piston bent, wheels jammed, the spirit of its furnace flung over its remains in a flickering pall of funeral flames. The

Sturgess was also a crippled wreck—funnel bent, boiler rent, steam bursting from unauthorized places. Neither engine could ever hope to run again without very extensive repairs.

Then there was excitement to know which had reached the middle point first. Amid uproar and confusion, Ramsden's judge was understood to give his verdict in favour of the Sturgess engine, and Sturgess's judge to give his in favour of the Ramsden engine. The referee was consequently appealed to, and he positively declined to pass a decisive sentence. He said that, as far as he could see, it was a dead-heat, slightly in favour of both of them.

And so the matter rested ; and the remains of the gallant little puff-puffs, which had sacrificed their lives at the shrine of glory, were recovered by their respective owners, and eventually set up, all shattered and shivered by the violence of the collision, under a glass case, and given a place of honour in the college museum. Cards were attached to them by blue ribbons, giving a brief account of the celebrated struggle, and so they were preserved to be handed down among the heirlooms through all future generations.

This rage for scientific recreation was by no means confined to toy-engines. A chemical chest was introduced, and experiments performed resulting in flame, smoke and smell. One boy got a magneto-electrical machine, which turned out a shocking investment.

And, among several other scientific toys, Ernest bought a galvanic battery, with yards of fine copper wire for sending telegraphic messages and performing other experiments.

It was Ernest's last week in the Shell, and he was exceedingly anxious to be top in week's marks, that he might take his leave with all the *élan* of a hero's apotheosis. The Shell was engaged in a lesson of Homer with Mr. Raikes. Ernest was at the top of the class, attending with all his might, his eyes riveted on the book and his mind absorbed in the lesson. The construing had been done, and drill was proceeding in the Homeric forms and epithets. Ernest was always alarmed at this artillery practice, but no question had yet passed him, and time would soon be up. Mr. Raikes was dilating upon the various adjectives applied to Jupiter, the fellows at the lower end of the class appearing to find a difficulty in remembering and keeping them distinct. This was the style of it :

'*Eribromos* ?'

'Cloud-compelling !'

'Next.'

'Sweet-smelling !'

'Next.'

'Foul-smelling !'

'Next.'

'Long-eared !'

'Next.'

‘Loud-thundering!’

‘Go up!’

Hardly were the last words spoken, when, as though Jupiter himself would signify his approval of the correct answer, there sounded a loud, thundering clap from the drawer of Mr. Raikes’ chair. Fizz, bang! went another crack, and eke a third. ‘Shivering claps and cracks!’ while sulphurous smoke uprose from the crevices of the drawer. Be sure Mr. Raikes was no longer seated! At the first report he bounced up as if shot, and his *pince-nez* flew off. He turned round to look at the chair, and winced perceptibly at each fresh crack. Everyone was thunder-struck. Mr. Raikes made some attempts to speak after the cannonade had ceased, and eventually succeeded.

‘I suppose some of you are implicated in this foolish outrage. I must report what has happened to the Doctor, and leave him to investigate it as he thinks right. We will finish the lesson, however.’

This last remark was added after he had opened the drawer, and satisfied himself that no further fulminations were probable. It might be wearisome to linger over the coincident details of this performance, how the boys discussed it and wondered how it had been managed. No touch-paper could have burned for an hour and fifty minutes, for they had been at work in the class-room since 9 o’clock, and the explosion took place at 10.50. The room was

locked immediately after the Homer lesson, and again after the subsequent morning lessons, and at afternoon school-time, as we stood round the door for admission, Dr. Saunderson sailed up and unlocked the door himself. When we were assembled he expressed his profound indignation at what he called 'another of those senseless and dastardly outrages which no right-minded boy would demean himself to commit.' He demanded to know how it happened? But no one volunteered any information; indeed, everyone seemed amazed. It was easy enough to put a cracker in the drawer of the chair, but how to explode it two hours afterwards baffled explanation. Clockwork contrivances for timing explosions were not familiarly used in those days.

Since no information was forthcoming the Doctor made us all 'line up' in the middle of the room, while he made his investigations. He examined the drawer and the remains of the cracker; then he opened each desk in succession. One boy's desk specially attracted his attention, for he went back after completing the round, and had another look into it. He examined it underneath; he examined the legs, and the floor in its neighbourhood. Then he went back to the chair and again examined the drawer, and even took it right out and felt about with his hand in the empty cavity.

The boys noticed that it was Fairfield's desk which received this particular notice. They nudged one an-

other and pointed. Ernest looked surprised, and got rather red.

‘Well,’ said the Doctor, ‘I am satisfied that the cracker was exploded by means of that battery in your desk, Fairfield. It was a deep-laid plot. There are copper wires passing from the cell to the drawer. It must have taken some time to arrange the trick, and there must have been some contrivance for completing the circuit at a given moment. I suppose the battery is your property?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Do you know anything about the plot?’

‘No, sir.’

Poor Ernest felt the blood mounting to his cheeks as he answered. In a moment all the horrible suspicions of last term were recalled. Was the ordeal to be repeated again? Ernest looked with a furious bewildered expression at Johnson, which was met by a strong and insolent stare.

The Doctor resumed his investigations, and soon traced the progress of the wires along parallel spaces between three boards in the floor. One wire passed directly into the drawer; the other diverged, so as to run just under the seat of the form in front of the master’s desk, passing along the entire length of the semicircular seat in detached links hooked loosely together. It was clear that any boy sitting on the seat could easily complete the circuit by joining two of these links if they happened to be disconnected where

he sat. The Doctor briefly stated his discoveries, and then left the room.

Immediately after lessons Ernest was sent for to the study. The Doctor looked very stern as he sat at his writing-table with multitudinous papers strewn over it. Suddenly he turned and said :

‘Fairfield, you are one of the strangest puzzles I ever knew ! Are these the iambics you sent up last Tuesday ?’

Ernest looked at the paper and said :

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Are you quite sure ?’

‘Quite certain, sir. I spilled some ink by mistake, and tried to scratch it out. There was no time to write them again.’

The Doctor took the paper, which was written very carefully, fifteen lines, copper-plate Greek, with breathings and accents, and author’s name complete. Then he said :

‘Well, just read me those three lines.’

Ernest read :

᾽Ω βρῦτε ᾽Ραῖκες, ᾽Ραῖκες ᾽ βρυτώτατε,  
πάντων κάκιστε βηστίων κολληγίων,  
᾽ βλεῦ μέ ὑπ βέφωρ ᾽ βλῶ ὑ ὑπ βέ ἰνδ.

‘Do you tell me you wrote that ?’ said the Doctor, rising from his chair.

‘No, sir, of course I didn’t. What can it mean ? It must be that infamous cad, Johnson, again !’



‘Stop a moment; you are rather too fond of accusing Johnson. I have not done with you yet. Are you aware that for some time past boys in the Shell have complained of having had money stolen? Some have found their purses gone. Suspicion was attached to you; and acting under my suggestion, the prefects made the Shell-boys mark all the coins in their possession, and told the shopkeepers to put by every piece of money that you paid to them. What is the result? Yesterday Armstrong went to four shops, and no less than six of these marked coins were given to him, each of which had been presented by you. To make matters more certain—if further proof could possibly be wanted—I had your study searched last night, when two of the missing purses were found behind the books in your shelf. Now it is absolutely incredible that all this is the work of Johnson, or anyone else, except yourself. I denounce you as an unprincipled impostor, guilty of the grossest falsehoods, the meanest deceit, the most infamous theft. The whole has been covered by plausible hypocrisy. My suspicions were strongly aroused last term; they have now been overwhelmingly confirmed. I cannot express my horror and indignation against you. I have to-day written to your father, asking him to come and take you away to-morrow. Meanwhile you will be kept in strict confinement. Come with me.’

The Doctor, who during this terrible impeachment

had walked to and fro, now laid his hand powerfully on Ernest's arm, and led him tottering out of the room, upstairs to a small bedroom lighted by a gas-jet. The Doctor pushed him in, and, shutting the door, locked it, and took away the key.

## CHAPTER XII.

### NIGHT AND MORNING.

ERNEST was so stunned by the Doctor's speech that for a long time he stood in the middle of the room, unable to realize the situation. Gradually the different points of accusation came over him: the cracker, the iambics. Ernest half questioned his own soundness of mind. Could he have arranged the wires and written those extraordinary lines in his sleep, and acted to his own destruction like the Spectre of Tappington? He had been so excited about his work, that possibly his head might have been turned. He had read of fellows overworking themselves crazy, and he half fancied it must be the case with himself. Then there rushed over his mind in a tumultuous conflict the Doctor's terrible words—unprincipled impostor, liar, thief, hypocrite—and finally the letter to his father! Ernest uttered a deep groan, and threw himself on the bed, and lay with his eyes fixed in a wild stare upon the ceiling. One thought swallowed up all others: What would his father and mother think when the letter arrived? His mother, with all her unbounded love! His father—ah! what had Dr. O'Grady said about a sudden shock?

It might perhaps kill his father! The thought made him mad! He sprang up from the bed. How could he meet his father? How could he possibly go home, when all his parents' love and pride in him must be crushed out of existence? He clenched his fists and hit out right and left with all his might into the air.

Presently he opened the window and looked out. He could see the illuminated face of the college clock. It was half-past six; the evening was cloudy. The room was on the first floor, in the same block as that of Mr. Raikes. Ernest could see the passage where he stood on the evening of the fifth of November. The distance from the window to the ground was about twenty feet. Ernest, as he looked, felt a ray of relief. He would wait till all was quiet for the night and escape from the window. The sheets, divided and knotted together, would easily reach to the ground.

Then the bell rang for tea, and a few minutes afterwards he heard footsteps in the passage. A servant brought him some tea and bread and butter and necessaries for the night, and locked the door again without a word.

Ernest was now rather more accustomed to the sense of his trouble. He had a good conscience. He could look Dr. Saunderson in the face and still say he had never wilfully told a lie in his life. Either he had done things in a state of mind when he was not responsible for his actions, or else it was Johnson. He never for a moment doubted that it was Johnson.

But he had been foully accused of hideous crimes against which his whole soul revolted. How could the Doctor dare to bring those horrible accusations against him? And yet—the marked coins! He had certainly been to the shops. He had bought three raspberry tarts at Stuffings', and paper and pens at Scribbler's, and a couple of oranges at Cheesy's. What could there have been odd about the coins? Who could have marked them?

Ernest thought on as he munched his bread and butter, and was able to take a calmer view of things. He was determined not to stop another night at St. Andrew's if he could help it. It would be some satisfaction to show the Doctor that he could not call him those horrible names for nothing. But where should he go if he did get away? He took out his purse; it contained sixteen shillings, enough to take him home; but how could he go home? The old flood of agonizing thoughts swept over him, and again he drew desperate gasps of breath. He rolled on the bed, and kicked and tore at the iron framework as if he would rend it asunder.

The chapel bell had tolled, the boys had gone to bed, the gas was turned off at the main; he watched the jet in his room dwindle in strength until it was only a minute blue spark; he got up and turned the tap, and then looked out of window. It was a very dark night. He would wait an hour or so, and then make an attempt for liberty.

Slowly the time passed before the clock struck twelve, and chimed the quarters on to one. He would wait another half-hour. He felt strongly excited. The quarter past . . . the half-hour. He got up and quickly removed the sheets. Folding them carefully on the floor, he divided them with his knife. Then, twisting each part into a rope, he knotted them firmly together. When this was done he tied one end round the central mullion of the double window, and having tested the whole as well as he could in the narrow compass, he quietly got through the window and let himself down hand-over-hand without any noise. In half a minute he was on the ground. Not a sound was heard. Running lightly while near the buildings, he darted across the playground and down the slopes on to the cricket-field, and as he bounded over the turf a sense of freedom made his limbs glow with vigorous warmth. In three minutes he had climbed over the fence and was outside the college grounds.

His mind was made up. He would walk to Gordington, a small town about twelve miles off, where there was a station on a branch line to Bristol, and take the first train in the morning. What should he do then? His mind was drawn in two opposite directions. He would like to go home and rush into his mother's arms, and say: 'Mother, don't be unhappy! It's all a mistake. You know I never told a lie, and as for stealing money, it's too laughable to be serious!' But, oh! what would be the effect of the

Doctor's cruel letter upon his father? Any sudden shock might be fatal. The horror of the thought in Ernest's mind seemed to sap the fountains of his life.

He walked on mile after mile. It was not so dark now. A moon three-quarters old had risen, and the road stretched out before him in a clear gray line, and he trudged briskly on, feeling all the better in body for the exercise, but paralyzed in mind. He could not help congratulating himself upon his easy escape, and he thought what an excitement there would be when the sheet was found dangling from the window. It struck him that his flight might go far towards making the fellows think he was guilty, but they would be sure to think so when the Doctor told them his convictions.

It was now five o'clock, and the eastern sky was brightening with the ethereal loveliness of a pale primrose hue, above the broad range of impenetrable vapour which brooded over the distant city of Bristol. Feathery clouds of an apricot tint floated softly in the primrose expanse, and the crisp exhilaration of a March morning dawned upon the world.

Ernest was glad to reach Gordington, for the long walk under present circumstances was a severe tax upon his strength. On arriving at the station, he found that a workmen's train would soon start for Bristol. He took a ticket and stood in company with some twenty artisans, and got into an empty third-

class carriage. During the journey exhausted nature began to assert her sway. A sense of extreme weariness—the result of his agitation and sleepless night and long walk—came over him, and with it his thoughts returned to the interview in Dr. Saunderson's study. 'Unprincipled impostor, thief, liar, plausible hypocrite!' The Doctor had called him those names, and written them home. He would have written in the most forcible language, and put every point forward with the clearest evidence. How could Ernest possibly match his word against the Doctor's? His mother would at first refuse to believe him guilty, but when all was laid so plainly before her, how could she help being convinced? She might say she trusted him still, but by what arguments could he make it seem the least probable that he was innocent? And then his father—could he bear up against the awful shock? Dr. Saunderson would be a murderer; The thought of going home under such a load of suspicion, and with such an agonizing prospect, was simply unbearable.

At seven o'clock he found himself on the platform at Bristol Station, and his first idea was to get breakfast. He went into a restaurant and sat down in a recess, and ordered ham and eggs, rolls and coffee. Ernest afterwards in happier days said he never made such a breakfast in his life. Having paid for it and tipped the waiter, he asked if he might see a paper and rest a little.



‘Certainly, sir ; as long as you please.’

Ernest stretched himself on the luxurious lounge, and in five minutes he was sound asleep. The waiter quietly drew the curtain of the recess that he might not be disturbed, and Ernest slept a long, sweet, dreamless sleep of nearly five hours.

It was past one o’clock when he awoke, thoroughly refreshed. He stretched and yawned several times, and came out and had a good wash and brush-up in the lavatory, and so passed into the street.

The blaze of afternoon was dazzling ; the sky cloudless blue, softened by a thin smoky haze, but still brilliant. The breath of life was in the breeze ; the streets were astir with busy traffic. Ernest felt the invigorating influence of new sights and sounds. He walked on, and seeing the masts of ships in the distance, he directed his way to the docks. A marvellous sight now opened to his view—a forest of shipping of various kinds, such as he had never before seen. He walked on enchanted. Huge steamers lay alongside the quay ; great merchantmen, with their tall, orange-red masts and tapering yards and maze of rigging ; everywhere bustle and activity—a sight full of wonder and attraction to a boy not familiar with such scenes. The water, moved by the wind, rippled in silvery floods within the dock, and lapped the monstrous keels with melodious music, making them shine like polished brass.

Ernest forgot his troubles while his mind was

riveted in admiration upon the magnificent ships. And now he came to one which seemed the handsomest of all—a noble clipper. The bustle on board seemed more brisk than on any ship he had seen. Sailors were upon the yards, getting the sails in order. The captain was walking about the deck, issuing commands. Ernest stood entranced among a group of sailors, watching the operations from the quay. He heard them say that this ship, the *Calypso*, was to sail that afternoon for the West Indies. They said she was a splendid vessel, and Ernest entered into conversation with them. They answered him civilly, and one man said :

‘ You looks as though you’d like to go with ‘em. Why don’t you ask the cap’n ? He’d take you right enough. He was only inquiring this morning for a youngster, and you look sturdy enough—not likely to be on the sick-list.’

‘ Do you really think he would take me ? Might I go on board ?’

‘ Ay, sure, they’ll let you go on board ; just walk down the gangway as if the whole world belonged to you. ’Tain’t every day a cap’n gets a chance of such a strapping young fellow as you.’

Ernest hesitated no longer. He took the man at his word, and boldly stepped upon the gangway, and in another moment was upon the deck. The captain was standing alone, looking about and occasionally giving an order, but otherwise unoccupied. Ernest

walked up to him, and, holding his school-cap in his hand, said :

‘ Will you take me with you, sir ? I’ll work hard and do anything you tell me, though I was never on board a ship before.’

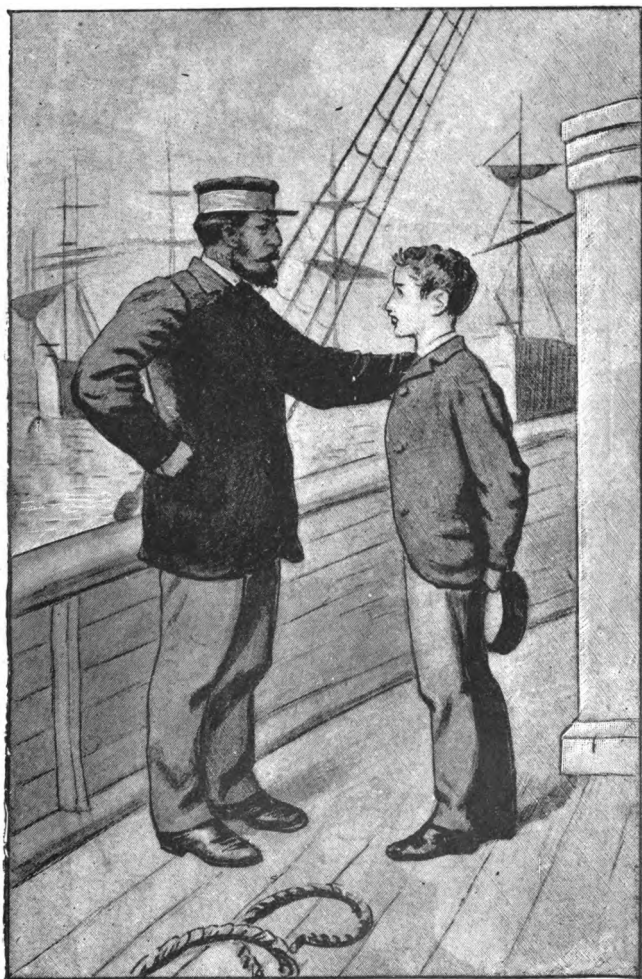
The captain looked at him steadily, taking him in from head to foot. The boy’s appearance was calculated to excite a sailor’s admiration—so handsome, and well set up, with his curly brown hair and healthy complexion, and the fire of youth burning in his eyes. The captain put his hand on Ernest’s shoulder, and said :

‘ What, my lad, you want to go to sea, eh ? Well, we want an extra hand, and you look the right sort of stuff. Mind, I shall ask no questions. You need not tell me your name. I mustn’t get into a row about you. I shall call you Jack ; and if you really care to come with us we’ll treat you kindly, and feed you well, and only give you easy work. Come, is it a bargain ?’

‘ Yes, sir, thank you.’

‘ All right then, Jack !’ and the captain took his hand and gave it a mighty shake, and said : ‘ We must get off those grand togs, Jack, and keep ’em for shore. Come to my cabin ; I’ve got a suit for you more to the purpose.’

Ernest went into the cabin, and soon reappeared in true sailor’s costume. He was then introduced to the bos’un, and sent to help stow away cargo below deck.



“ ‘What, my lad, you want to go to sea, eh?’ ”

See page 160.



He worked with a will, and pleased the sailors by the nimbleness and strength he displayed. It was just the work to suit him, wherein the hands might labour, and the heart follow, and the head take it easy.

An hour or so passed, and a bell sounded for dinner. Ernest received a pannikin of soup, some bread, and a slice of meat. He ate with a good heart, and afterwards went to work again. By four o'clock everything was finished. He had nothing more to do for the present, and stood on deck wrapped in a kind of strange dream. The sailor who had talked to him recognised him, and shouted :

'So you be going along with 'em—good luck to you !'

And now a tug-steamer, pouring forth volumes of black smoke, came panting up. The cable was quickly adjusted, the hawsers were loosed to the sing-song accompaniment of sailors' voices, the gangway was rattled off upon the quay, and, amid waving of caps and handkerchiefs and shouts of 'Farewell !' the *Calypso* moved from her moorings and began her voyage towards the Severn sea.

The remembrance of yesterday's trouble had utterly vanished from Ernest's mind, swallowed up in the ecstasy of new life. The great vessel went forward on her course down the Avon. Ernest could not repress an exclamation of amazement as they passed under the Clifton Suspension Bridge, with the

Nightingale Woods fringing the defile where the busy clink of quarrymen's hammers sounded clear upon the air. Men, women, and children, walking on the roads which run parallel with the river, stood still to watch the gallant ship. Portishead was passed, and Clevedon and Weston—the Steep and Flat Holms—and a momentary pang shot through Ernest's soul as he looked in the direction of Lewesdon Hill. But he quickly turned his gaze in the opposite direction, where Cardiff loomed across the waters in its shroud of smoke. The beautiful Bay of Porlock, and the bold Foreland, with Lynmouth climbing up the wooded heights to Linton; past Ilfracombe and the blinking lighthouse on Bull Point; past Hartland, onwards towards the fading glory of a grand sunset conflagration. The sun had long since sunk like a red-hot globe in the sea, making a crimson pathway for the ship. The twilight had deepened, all sail had been set, the tug had gone back, the stars come out—'the forget-me-nots of the angels'—and the stately vessel sailed out into the dark-heaving, infinite waters of the Atlantic.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

PROBABLY there are few deeper sources of happiness to parents than the assurance that their sons are doing well at school. Those words of the wise king, 'A good report maketh the bones fat,' find a close application in the parental mind with reference to their boys. A good report—untarnished by any qualifications softly worded (it may be) to disguise as far as possible the sense of failure, but still as obvious in their meaning as a more open avowal of dissatisfaction—is a very precious document in a father's hands. And conversely, as Euclid says, when a father receives from his boy's schoolmaster a bad report, or a special letter entering particularly into details which show that the son is not 'walking in the way safely,' the contrast is as great; few deeper sources of unhappiness than that sheet of paper can affect a parent's soul.

Colonel and Mrs. Fairfield were sitting at the breakfast-table in the dining-room at Combe Grange when the post arrived bringing Dr. Saunderson's letter. Being an old campaigner, the Colonel never



opened any letter in public, unless sure beforehand that it probably contained nothing of an unpleasant character. He sorted out of the letter-bag the letters addressed to his wife. Then, looking over his own, he recognised the Doctor's handwriting. As the letter was unexpected, and seemed of portentous dimensions, the Colonel put it in his pocket, and opened one or two others of trivial importance. After breakfast he went into his study and read Dr. Saunderson's letter in private, and as he read it his face grew pale with agitation, and his heart sank within him. It was written, as Ernest had surmised, in the strongest terms. Charges of the grossest impertinence to a master, of the most deliberate falsehoods and systematic theft, had been proved against his son beyond any shadow of doubt. It was, therefore, impossible for him to remain another day at St. Andrew's College. Dr. Saunderson therefore found it his painful duty to request Colonel Fairfield to come immediately on receipt of this letter and take his son away. The letter concluded with expressions of the deepest sympathy and regret that such a course was rendered necessary.

The perusal of this letter was a very serious shock to the Colonel's system. As he sat leaning back in his chair and tried to think calmly upon the matter, his breath came in short broken gasps. He felt his feet and hands grow cold; he tried to rise, but could not; all his strength seemed to desert him; his brain

seemed a whirl of confusion, and then suddenly he became unconscious.

Mrs. Fairfield, little thinking what had happened, went about her household duties as usual, and when these were finished she went, as her custom was, to her husband's study. On entering the room she was overwhelmed with horror to see the Colonel with his head thrown back in the chair, his eyes closed, his face pale as death, his mouth open, and his white hands hanging listlessly over the arms of the chair. Mrs. Fairfield instantly opened the window, and rang the bell. The servant came and fetched restoratives. Old John was sent for Dr. O'Grady, and after a most anxious half-hour the Colonel slowly recovered from his swoon.

As he lay resting on the sofa with closed eyes, Mrs. Fairfield read the letter. Perhaps it would have troubled her very seriously had she read it under less agitating circumstances; as it was, anxiety for her husband absorbed every other consideration. She felt so certain of Ernest's innocence that the terrible accusations of Dr. Saunderson only occasioned her a moment's disquietude. When Dr. O'Grady arrived, Mrs. Fairfield saw him in the drawing-room before he went into the study. She explained what was evidently the cause of the Colonel's attack, for he had not spoken since he recovered consciousness.

'Ah, my dear lady,' replied the doctor in his strong Irish accent, 'the brave old warrior is not so young as

he was. These strokes of the pen have done him more serious mischief than those of the Sepoy swords. You must keep him very quiet, and not let him worry over it more than you can help. Sure, but he must no more go to Washborough than to the moon, nor stir out of the house this day. Ah, but it's a terrible business all round! Poor Master Ernest! Dear boy, there cannot be any truth in all that jargon. I would like to horsewhip the scoundrel who has got him into trouble round the college quadrangle!

'I am certain it is all a mistake,' replied Mrs. Fairfield, much moved by the quaint little doctor's sympathy; 'but as the Colonel cannot possibly go to Washborough, I must go, if you think I can safely leave him for so long. Tell me exactly the truth, please.'

'There would be no risk in your going, my dear madam, so far as the Colonel is concerned. I shall give him some soothing medicine, and he will have a quiet sleep. He must have plenty of beef-tea with a little brandy in it, and he will be all right by the evening. I shall come in and see him every three hours about. But I wish I could go and fetch your boy for you.'

'No; thank you very much for the kind thought. You must not leave my husband, doctor.'

The medical interview was as satisfactory as Dr. O'Grady could expect. The Colonel had an iron constitution, which even the dangerous heart-symptoms,

which for some time had been apparent, could not shatter at a single blow. He was made of the stern stuff which characterizes the heroes among British soldiers, and before Dr. O'Grady left he had rallied sufficiently to talk the matter over with his wife. They read the letter calmly together and discussed it; and, as always happens, the sharing of anxiety with a sympathetic spirit in some measure disarmed it of its sting.

Mrs. Fairfield said, with a smile, that she would go and fetch her darling boy home. It was a journey of four hours from Bridport to Washborough, and the trains were convenient both for going and returning.

'Well, my love,' said the Colonel, 'if I am not to go, I suppose it must be you. It is clear that Dr. Saunderson will not keep Ernest at any price. It's a terrible business; but you think there is some mistake? You do not believe him guilty of lying and stealing?'

'Of course it is a mistake, dear. Ernest never told an untruth in his life; and of course he never stole. It is all so ridiculous! He knows he has only to write home whenever he wants money. He is the truest-hearted boy in the world. I am absolutely certain that it is all the work of that wicked boy Johnson, or of some other equally unprincipled person. I will go and bring him home.'

'Very well, my love; go and bring him home—go and bring him home.'

So Mrs. Fairfield left strict directions with the cook and housemaid to look well after the Colonel, and carry out Dr. O'Grady's instructions most carefully, and send for him at any moment if any alarming symptoms occurred. They would naturally have done all that affection could suggest, for everyone in the household loved the dear old gentleman, to whom the hoary head was in good truth a crown of glory, because the condition attached by Solomon was abundantly fulfilled.

There was ample time to catch the 11.30 train, and old John drove his honoured lady to the station. She reached Washborough at 3.30, and had an hour and a half before the train started for the return journey.

Mrs. Fairfield drove at once to St. Andrew's. Though she never for a moment doubted Ernest's innocence, yet her heart somewhat misgave her in prospect of the meeting with Dr. Saunderson; and as the fly climbed the steep hill through the town, prolonged anxiety caused her much distress. But she was a brave woman, and fortified her soul by fervent prayer and the firm conviction of Ernest's innocence.

It was almost a relief when the fly drew up at the college entrance, and the deep-toned bell was rung. The pompous porter appeared, and Mrs. Fairfield alighted. The porter escorted her to the head-master's house, and she was shown into the drawing-room. A few moments afterwards the Doctor entered, and bowed

in a dignified manner to the lady before him. She explained that Colonel Fairfield was not well enough to undertake the journey, and so she had come instead. She did not allude to the subject of the letter.

Dr. Saunderson at once asked whether Ernest had not already appeared at home, and when Mrs. Fairfield replied in the negative, he told her that Ernest had escaped from the room in which he had been confined last night, and though every inquiry had been made, the search so far had not been successful.

‘I telegraphed to Colonel Fairfield this morning, as soon as I ascertained that your son was not to be found, but I presume you left home before the telegram arrived.’

This startling information was an additional stab to the mother’s wounded heart. By way of saying something, she asked :

‘Have you communicated with the police?’

‘Yes, I did so at once, and also inquired whether a boy answering to his description had left the station by any of the early trains. None of the railway officials had seen him. It is a very grave and sad trouble, Mrs. Fairfield, and I am profoundly sorry for you and the Colonel. I did not enter into minute particulars of all that is proved against your son in my letter to your husband, thinking it better to speak than to write about it. But I hardly like to cause you further distress by entering into details.’

Mrs. Fairfield looked up as calmly as the state of her feelings would allow, and said :

‘Dr. Saunderson, you would never succeed in convincing me that my son told untruths and stole money. I know him well enough to feel certain that those accusations are false, whatever the evidence may be. I do not for a moment doubt that you have acted as you thought right, but I have no hesitation whatever in saying that your conclusions are incorrect. I can only hope that the matter may eventually be cleared up, so as to free him from your suspicions.’

The Doctor answered :

‘I wish I could think there was any chance of that, Mrs. Fairfield. Unhappily the proof admits of no question. I would gladly make allowance for a boy being led into temptations and falling, and even yielding to the momentary impulse of attempting to cover his faults by an untruth. But your son has been guilty of even grosser guilt ;’ and the Doctor explained as briefly as possible the facts about the stolen money, the marked coins, and purses found in Ernest’s study.

‘I have no doubt,’ said Mrs. Fairfield, ‘that the marked coins were put into Ernest’s purse, and the purses put behind his books by some enemy of his, with a view to getting him into trouble. That is certainly more probable than that my son was guilty of such terrible crimes.’

The Doctor shook his head sadly, and said he

thought, if she knew the intricacies of the matter, that she would see how impossible it was to admit such inferences.

‘Well, I thank you, Dr. Saunderson, for sparing me so much time. I must not trespass further, but perhaps you will kindly allow me to see Maurice Elton for a few moments before leaving?’

‘Certainly, Mrs. Fairfield; I will send him up at once. I sincerely hope we shall be able to trace your boy. The police have promised to spare no exertions, and I trust you will convey to Colonel Fairfield the assurance of my cordial sympathy with him in this most unhappy business.’

‘Thank you, Dr. Saunderson; I will certainly do so. And now I will not detain you any further, as I must be going in a few minutes. The fly is waiting at the college gate, if you will kindly let me see Maurice Elton. Good-bye, and many thanks for all your kindness.’

The Doctor withdrew, and Maurice was shortly afterwards shown into the drawing-room. Mrs. Fairfield held out both her hands, and took those of Maurice, and drawing him towards her, kissed him affectionately; and then, before she could speak a word, her pent-up feelings mastered her entirely, and she wept burning tears of unutterable anguish.

‘Oh, dear Mrs. Fairfield,’ said Maurice, ‘I am so sorry for you! What can I say to comfort you? I am certain Ernest is innocent. It is all that infamous



fellow Johnson. I am sure it is. Poor Ernest! Of course he ran away. How could he stand such cruel accusations? How could he submit to such suspicion? Please don't cry. It will all come right; I am sure it must in a very little while. It is terribly hard to bear, but Ernest never told a lie in his life!

'Thank you, dear Maurice. It does me so much good to hear you say that. It is true. But what has become of Ernest? What shall I say to his father? The letter this morning nearly killed him. He had another of those dreadful fainting-fits, and was unconscious nearly an hour.'

'Was he? How dreadful! But you must cheer him up, and take heart yourself, Mrs. Fairfield. It must come right in the end. I understand Ernest's feelings. He thought the Doctor would convince you that he had done all those horrid things, and he could not bear to see you grieved; and so he thought he would just keep out of the way for a little, until the matter was cleared up.'

'Well, Maurice, it is God's will. These troubles do not come by chance, and we must try and submit with patience.'

Poor Mrs. Fairfield! She had borne up against her feelings while the Doctor was present. Her indignation at the hasty and cruel injustice (as she thought) of his charges nerved her to the effort of holding back her sorrow. But now, in presence of Ernest's dearest friend, with the memory of past

holidays so vividly before her mind, all attempts to restrain her grief were unavailing.

The chiming of the clock upon the mantelpiece warned her that she must not stay longer; so taking a fond farewell of Maurice, and asking him to come to Combe Grange as soon as he could after the end of term, she set out on her homeward journey.

On reaching home she found the Colonel eagerly expecting her arrival, and it required all her tact to break the news of Ernest's disappearance gently, so as not to agitate him afresh.

Ah me! the heartaches of parents for their children when things go wrong! Who can estimate their anguish? Boys, think of those words of your duty, to LOVE, HONOUR AND SUCCOUR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER. The whole moral and point of this story is to show the trouble and misery brought upon Ernest Fairfield, which flowed with an overwhelming flood upon his parents, by what? Was it his own fault that he became the victim of a degraded, unprincipled boy? He had befriended him at first from generous motives; the very force of circumstances had cemented intimacy. But what said the Great Teacher? 'Be wise as serpents, harmless as doves.' What said the wise king? 'My son . . . enter not into the path of the wicked . . . avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away . . . their sleep is taken away unless they cause some to fall.' The wisdom of serpents is needed

in the choice of friends at school. That bitter instructor Experience may teach the force of this truth when it is too late—when remorse for ‘what might have been’ is feeding on the heart like a worm that never dies. Johnson was a wicked boy, though at first Ernest didn’t know it. Ernest, prompted in a measure by generous impulses—though influenced as well by a careless tendency towards foolishness, frivolity, and idleness—entered into his path, and eventually Johnson did not rest until he caused Ernest to fall. That was the substance of the preface, reserved for this place in the hope that it may not escape notice.

Days and weeks and months passed on, and still there was no news of Ernest. The shadows gathered on Combe Grange. The mother’s spirit fainted in her, and hope deferred made her heart sick. The brave old Colonel tried to appear cheerful before his wife, but the iron had entered into his soul, and his life was consumed with secret grief. The only diversion which seemed in any way to console him was his violoncello. He would play by the hour with Mrs. Fairfield, and it was her greatest pleasure to see the soft relief which music gave to his wearied soul. At other times he would sit by himself in the drawing-room, and play the sweet melancholy music—soothing melodies from Handel and Beethoven and other great masters.

Or he would rest in his study with his Bible open upon his knees. There was one chapter which he

often read, that one which tells how David received the news of Absalom's death. The Colonel would repeat to himself over and over again the last verse, which, of all recorded utterances of a father's sorrow over his son, is surely the most full of affection, pathos, and regret: 'And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!'

Dr. O'Grady came regularly to see the old soldier, and each time he looked more serious, and intimated to Mrs. Fairfield that grief seemed to have taken a deep hold upon his patient. His face and form grew more thin and wan. And so things went on. Maurice had spent a week of the Easter holidays at Combe Grange, and his society afforded some comfort to the sorrowing parents. The new life of spring passed on towards the full glory of summer, and in the last week of June, after a period of more pronounced feebleness, the wearied soul of the gallant old officer sank into its last sleep, and the last words he murmured were, 'My son! my son!'

They buried him in the beautiful churchyard at Beechenhurst, and all the village attended to pay the last tribute of respect to his memory. Mrs. Fairfield, completely broken down by all she had undergone, went to her sister, who lived at Oxford.

Combe Grange was deserted, the servants discharged, the furniture sold. Only old John remained to take charge of the empty house, which was at once advertised to be sold ; and only the antiquated violoncello-case remained from the former furniture—a silent yet eloquent witness of the truth that death has not yet lost its sting, nor the grave its victory, and that the sting of death is sin.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### SIN VICTUS.

‘WHAT?’—that question at the close of the first chapter was asked in a tone of desperate agony by the boy calling himself ‘Sin Vincent,’ *alias* Edgar Johnson. As he asked it, he reeled and staggered and stumbled, and would have fallen had not the old sexton caught him by the arm.

The sexton had told him how his master gradually sank and died, overpowered by his son’s expulsion from school—that the son had disappeared and never been heard of—that his mother had almost lost her reason by all she had to bear—and then Johnson asked for the name of this family.

The answer utterly overwhelmed him. At last the conviction of his sin was forced upon him—that long system of sin, ‘vincent’ hitherto, ‘victus’ at last. Suddenly was he brought face to face with the awful consequences of his cruel wickedness, while his heart still quailed under the terrors of the haunted house seen in the shadowy gloaming of late summer twilight. Johnson felt his very life-blood freeze, and all consciousness deserted him.

This had occurred half-way between the gate and the house of Bracken Dene. Old John was not equal to the effort of carrying the boy. He laid him down gently on the turf, and hobbled up to the house, and asked the man-servant to come and help carry him. Between them both Johnson was brought up, and the housekeeper lent her services in getting him to bed. Then she went to tell his uncle what had happened.

Mr. St. Vincent had passed the golden bridge of life. He had never married, and was styled by some of his acquaintances a 'crusty old bachelor.' He was a martyr to gout, and his sufferings had made him irritable and fidgety. His only sister had married an officer in the Ceylon police-force, and their son, Edgar Johnson, was being educated in England. His parents showed little interest in his existence. They had arranged with the uncle to receive their boy in the holidays, and clothe and educate him at his discretion, a yearly sum being paid which covered all expenses and left a liberal margin for remuneration. Edgar was not the sort of nephew to win his uncle's affection. His uncle regarded him as a troublesome nuisance, and would have resigned the charge had it not been for the pecuniary profit. Under these circumstances Johnson naturally looked upon himself as an outcast, homeless and friendless; he had no self-respect, and the evil propensities of his nature grew unchecked.

Mrs. Burridge knocked at her master's door and received a gruff command to enter.

'Sorry to interrupt you, sir, but Master Edgar is took bad. I've put him to bed, sir, and done everything as I can; but he don't seem to come round. Had I better send for the doctor?'

'Humph! what's the matter? Stuffed himself with poisonous messes? Send for the doctor, and don't bother me about him any more.'

Dr. O'Grady was sent for, and found Johnson beginning to recover consciousness—moaning and tossing restlessly in bed, and in a very feverish condition. He told the housekeeper to keep him warm, and sit up with him, and give him milk if he was thirsty, and he would call in the morning. He did not see Mr. St. Vincent that evening.

Mrs. Burridge had a disquieting night of it. The boy was in a highly excitable nervous state in the intervals of drowsy slumber. He would lie dozing for perhaps a quarter of an hour, and then start up and mutter and scream out, and try to kick the clothes off. He did not know the housekeeper. Then he would stare round with a wild, agonized expression, and scream out, 'Take it away! Take away that horrible coffin! Why don't they take it away? I can't stand it!' and he became so violent that it required Mrs. Burridge's whole strength to keep him down. He became calmer between these paroxysms, and towards dawn fell into an uneasy sleep.



Dr. O'Grady paid his visit about eight o'clock, and found the boy terribly distressed, with the fever considerably heightened. He saw Mr. St. Vincent, and told him he feared the boy was ill with brain-fever, and possibly it might be a long and serious illness. Mr. St. Vincent was in a great rage.

'Hang the young brute! What does he mean by giving me all this bother? Isn't it enough to be saddled with him when he's well? I will not have him laid up here, doctor. I am leaving this outlandish place next week. Suggest something; can't I send him to the hospital?'

'No, sir, that would hardly do. But I can find a woman in the village, no doubt, who would be glad to nurse him in her house, and I could drive him there and look after him. There would be no risk in that; but a journey to the hospital would be unadvisable.'

'Anything. I don't care what you do with him—poison him by mistake, if you like—it would be a kindness to his parents. I put the case in your hands, doctor. His parents are well off, and will pay handsomely. Hold me responsible, and make what arrangements you please, only don't worry me about him any more.'

'I will see to it being done for his comfort, sir, and will not trouble you further than is necessary.'

Dr. O'Grady drove off, and had no difficulty in coming to terms with a homely old woman, Mrs.

Wright, to nurse Johnson in her own cottage. It was a pretty cottage with gay flowers in the front garden, and scrupulously clean. The room intended for his patient had a large bay window, and all the domestic appliances seemed suitable for the purpose. He saw the mattress and bedding set round the kitchen fire to air, and saying he would bring his patient in two hours' time, he went off and ordered in necessary supplies.

At eleven o'clock the doctor's carriage drew up in front of Dame Wright's cottage. The man-servant from Bracken Dene assisted the doctor in carrying Johnson up to the bedroom. He was so enveloped in blankets that all attempts at resistance were prevented; but it had been hot work packing him up, and both men felt as if they had had a hard day's work after the boy was put to bed.

Long days of wearisome illness followed. There were violent fits of delirium, and evidence of vivid hallucinations harassing the disordered brain of the unhappy boy. One afternoon an itinerant organ-grinder visited the village, and that seemed to start a fresh train of ideas. All through the following night he seemed haunted by the weird strains of ghostly music. His appeals were heart-rending to take it away. Mrs. Wright was well-nigh distraught with constant nursing. She occasionally got a neighbour to come and take her place in the sick-room, while she lay down to get a little sleep; but it was a dreary

time for her—hour after hour to listen to the restless moanings of the sufferer.

One day during the height of the illness, the sexton came to see how things were going on. He had been much perplexed about the strange attack which had so suddenly struck down the boy. He felt some qualms that he was to blame for taking him over the house. It was that which seemed to have started the mischief. Mrs. Wright had always been friendly to old John, and now she was only too glad to find him sympathetic in her troubles. On this occasion Johnson appeared to have the only lucid interval that marked the progress of his illness. Old John had gone up to the bed, and said, in as cheerful a voice as he could assume :

‘I be terrible sorry to see you so low, young master.’

Johnson moved wearily and looked at him. It was a long look, and there seemed in it more of the light of reason than had been seen there since the illness began. Then Johnson talked:

‘What was his name? Fairfield—Ernest Fairfield . . . I got him expelled. . . . I killed his father and drove his mother mad. . . . I’ve been ill, but I know what I am saying. . . . I told lies about him. . . . I made them believe he lied and stole. . . . I tell you it was all my doing. . . . I stole the purses. . . . I marked Fairfield’s money. . . . Are you listening? . . . I copied his “jambics” and put in bosh. . . . I went

into the class-room at night, and set the wires and cracker.'

Then the effort seemed to bewilder his senses again. He sprang up and waved his arms with frantic energy, and shrieked out :

'Take it away! take it away! I won't! I won't! Oh, they're cutting me—they're burning me—they're dragging me down to hell! Take it away!' and he fell back exhausted, and lay moaning and tossing in miserable anguish.

When old John got back to the Grange, he took out pen and paper, and wrote down all he could remember of what Johnson had said. The paper was clearly written, and only one sentence at all puzzled me to explain—the words in the original were :

'I coppered his jamsticks and pudding broth.' •

Later on that afternoon, when Dr. O'Grady paid his visit, Johnson's restlessness had assumed more violent symptoms. The doctor was proceeding to feel his pulse and take his temperature ; and the boy resisted with such energy that he sent the doctor sprawling on the floor, and then jumped out of bed with the apparent intention of attacking him. Johnson, in his night-shirt, advanced towards his foe, hitting out lustily ; and there followed a ludicrous scene. The little Irishman, active as a gibbon, picked himself up in a trice. He thought it might do his patient no harm, and possibly relieve his brain to indulge the pugilistic propensities, which appeared for the moment

uppermost in his disordered mind. In an instant, then, he slipped off his coat, and doubled up his shirt-sleeves, and assumed an attitude of self-defence, dancing about on tiptoe, and jabbering his comical Irish jargon.

‘Och, sure, ye miserable spalpeen! By the living Moses, ye want to hit me in the eye entirely! St. Patrick and old Ireland! Paddy O’Grady’s the boy for a row! Blackthorns and Donnybrook Fair are the jockeys for him! Come on!’

Of course the doctor merely contented himself with parrying the furious blows aimed at him, though making feints of retaliating.

‘Och, there’s one for your blinker, ye scoundrel! Take that—and that! Faith! the claret’s spouting. . . . Ah! blood, fire, and murder!’

This last exclamation, pitched in a shriller key than the rest, was due to the finishing stroke of this strange scene. For Patrick O’Grady, backing before his antagonist, came against a great box which stood in the recess of the bay window. The lid just caught him in the bend of the knees, and the comical Irishman found himself tripped up and deposited in the recess, with his legs helplessly extended over the box. This strangely novel treatment of a patient suffering from brain fever proved more efficacious for the time being than any remedies which the doctor’s skill had as yet suggested. Johnson, apparently satisfied by the discomfiture of his foe, went back quietly to bed,

drew the clothes over him and fell into a more peaceful sleep than he had enjoyed since he was ill.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was a soft bright morning in September—just that hardly perceptible chill in the air which breathes the first melancholy intimation that summer is gone. Mrs. Fairfield, who had now composed herself to resignation for a lifelong sorrow, had taken a small house in Oxford to be near her sister; and Maurice, who had been spending the holidays with her, came into the drawing-room dressed in boating flannels. Mrs. Fairfield enjoyed the river, and Maurice was never so happy as when rowing her about. She was standing by the window that opened on the lawn, and turned towards him with the same sweet loving look as of old, even more beautiful under the chastening influence of grief.

‘Maurice dear, there’s a telegram for you. I hope your aunt does not want to take you away from me?’

Maurice tore open the envelope. His face turned white, and then with a gasp he read out the words: ‘*Ernest Fairfield is at Beechenhurst—go to him at once.*’

‘Oh, Mrs. Fairfield, thank God!’

He sprang forward and threw his arms round her neck, and from the mother’s eyes tears of joy too deep for utterance flowed fast and free. They sat down on the sofa, and read the telegram many times, and then Maurice jumped up and sang and laughed

and cried, and could not control the overwhelming rapture of his joy.

‘Off I go at once. Oh, where’s Bradshaw? When’s there a train? How glorious! Oh, Mrs. Fairfield, isn’t it splendid?’

The mention of Bradshaw gave a practical turn to the entrancing news. The page was soon found: there was a train within the hour. Maurice hastened to change his flannels, and having put up a few things in a bag, he bounded off to the station, and was soon speeding on his way.

Ernest had landed at Bristol the day before, and travelled at once to Bridport. He wore a loose Inverness cape and muffled his face in a comforter, and slipped out of Bridport station and through the town without being recognised. He would not ask a question of anyone, and turned into the fields to wend his way home by the dear familiar paths.

With a nervous wonder and yearning in his heart he drew near the village. The sun was setting; the church tower and thatched roofs of the cottages stood up among the trees flushed with the glory of his departing rays. The Grange was hidden behind the hill. He turned into the churchyard. Was it altered since last he saw it? . . . What was that beautiful new white marble cross?

\* \* \* \* \*

The old sexton had been sweeping out the church, and after locking the door he went to have a last look

at his dear master's grave. His surprise was great to see a figure kneeling with arms thrown around the cross. Old John started, and went nearer.

'Master Ernest! Dear Master Ernest! God be praised for all His mercies! You've come back once more—you've come back!'

Ernest rose from his knees, and grasped the old man's hand with passionate affection, and said in a voice broken by choking sobs:

'Tell me all about it, John.'

He took the old man's arm, and walked back with him to the deserted Grange, and heard everything.

Maurice drove with all haste from Bridport to Beechenhurst. Oh, for the sorrow and joy of meeting between the two friends! As soon as Ernest was assured of his mother's welfare, he told Maurice the bare outlines of what had happened since the night he escaped from St. Andrew's; how, for very shame, he dared not go home with the stain of such awful suspicion upon him; how he had gone to Bristol and sailed in the *Culypso* to the West Indies; how the good captain treated him with all kindness, and on landing at Jamaica got him work in one of the dock offices; how he remained there while the ship went to San Salvador; how on its return he accepted the captain's offer to take him back to England.

'And now,' said Ernest, 'I find my dear father dead, and the old home deserted! Oh, Maurice, will God ever forgive me?'



They could not return to Oxford that day, and so had some hours of daylight at their disposal.

They called upon Dr. O'Grady, who was delighted to see them, and congratulated Ernest on his return. He tried to comfort him for his father's death by saying that the old man had been gradually failing for some time past, and that in the natural course of things he would but have had a lingering period of decrepitude.

'And so,' said Dr. O'Grady, 'my unhappy patient was the cause of all your trouble, Ernest! Well, well! it's a queer world we live in! One thing is certain, he will never be able to hurt you again, nor to ask your forgiveness for the past. God have mercy on him! I should like you to see him, Ernest, for possibly the sight of you might kindle a spark of intelligence. Should you mind?'

'No, doctor; I will see him.'

'That's right. It is strange that the only time he knew what he was saying was that afternoon when he told the sexton of his infamous conduct. Ah, my boy! you have been the victim of abominable lies; but he is paid out with interest.'

It was a sad interview. Ernest and Maurice accompanied the doctor to the cottage. Johnson was awake, moaning and talking to himself. Ernest stood looking at him a long time. He took his hand. Johnson turned his vacant eyes upon him, and then on Maurice. From one to the other he looked, but never a ray of

intelligence lighted up his countenance. Dr. O'Grady shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. Neither of the boys spoke. And so they left him.

'Poor fellow,' said the doctor, 'there's no hope for him; no prospect but that of idiocy for the rest of his life!'

Maurice and Ernest had time for a walk up Lewesdon Hill that evening. When they reached the top, the sun, near to setting, was behind a great purple-black cloud, his amber rays spreading upwards in broad shafts of light. The bluff escarpment of Pilsden loomed in shadow. The boys stood with bare heads watching the splendid effect. The south-west wind, which brings the waves in gigantic volume upon the Chesil beach, was blowing strong and free.

'Maurice,' said Ernest, 'have you forgotten the seal of the covenant?'

And Ernest took it out of his pocket, now entirely worn down to half its original thickness, and quite smooth.

'I remember what you used to say up here about mother. I have at last really learnt what you meant; and henceforth, by God's help, my life shall be devoted to her. Here, by Frank's tree, I promise solemnly to love, honour, and succour her to my fullest power, and may God strengthen me to keep that promise!'

Farewell, Ernest Fairfield! Life is before you. Sobered, chastened, and corrected, but not given over

unto death ; bent, but not broken by the blast, may  
God indeed strengthen you to keep that promise !

Boy, ere the cares of life lie dim  
On thy young spirit's wings,  
Now, in thy morn, forget not Him  
From whom each pure thought springs.

So, in the onward vale of tears,  
Where'er thy path may be,  
When strength hath bowed to evil years,  
He will remember thee.

THE END.

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